A

DISCOURSE

CONCERNING THE

DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

BY WILLIAM SHERLOCK, D.D.

SECOND AMERICAN EDITION.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTICE.

THE publisher of the present edition of Dr. Sherlock's celebrated work on the "Divine Providence," feels assured that he need offer no apology for bringing it out at this time. The great importance of the subject; the unquestioned ability with which it is discussed; the fact, that for many years the work has been out of print, and the frequent calls that have been made for it, during his several years' experience in the book business, together with the high estimation in which it is held by the following clergymen, who have cheerfully furnished recommendatory notices, he thinks fully warrant him in presenting it before the public in a new and greatly improved dress.

RECOMMENDATORY NOTICES.

Pittsburgh, August 3, 1848.

REV. J. L. READ:—I heartily approve of your intention to publish "SHERLOCK ON PROVIDENCE." I read the work years ago, and have regarded it ever since as one of the most valuable theological works in my library. You have my best wishes for success.

C. COOKE, D.D.

Pastor Liberty Street M. E. Church, Pittsburgh.

August 7, 1848.

Dr. Sherlock's Essay on "DIVINE PROVIDENCE" has earned for itself a reputation amongst the pious and thinking both of this and the Old World. To those who have not had the opportunity or privilege of knowing its worth, it may be said, (to others it is needless,) that it is a most judicious, scriptural, and practical discussion of this difficult, but most delightful doctrine.

D. H. RIDDLE, D.D.

Pastor Third Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh.

August 7, 1848.

Sherlock on "Divine Providence" is an admirable book; full of mature and pious thought, sound argument, and beautiful illustration. It is one of those sterling old books with which every Christian, and especially every Christian minister, should be thoroughly familiar.

Rev. W. Hunter, M.A.
Editor Pittsburgh Christian Advocate.

August 9, 1848.

The argument of Dr. Sherlock on "Divine Providence" appears to me to be complete and conclusive. The scriptural authorities are happily chosen, and signally clear and forcible in their application to the points on which they are made to bear; and the illustrations are lucid and striking. I most cordially recommend the work to the religious public.

George Upfold, D.D.
Rector of Trinity Church, Pittsburgh.

August 9, 1848.

I heartily concur with the recommendation of the Rev. Dr. Upfold.

Rev. Thomas Crumpton,
Rector of Christ's Church, Allegheny City.

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A

DISCOURSE

OF THE

DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

THE INTRODUCTION.

My chief design in this following treatise, is so to explain the nature of Providence, as to reconcile men to the belief of it, and to possess them with a religious awe and reverence of the supreme and absolute Lord of the world. For it is very evident, that the mistakes about the nature of Providence are the principal objections against it, which tempt some men to deny a Providence, or so weaken the sense of it in others that they are very little the better for believing it. That a Divine Providence does govern the world, I have proved largely enough for my present design in the "Discourse concerning a Future Judgment," cap. i. § 3, which I refer my reader to. But that this work might not seem to want a foundation, I have not wholly omitted the proof of a Providence, but have at least said enough to convince those of a Providence who believe that there is a God.

The whole is divided into nine chapters.

I. The necessary connection between the belief of a God and of a Providence.

II. The general notion of Providence, and particularly concerning a preserving Providence.

III. Concerning God's governing Providence.

IV. The sovereignty of Providence.
V. The justice of Providence.
VI. The holiness of Providence.
VII. The goodness of Providence.
VII. The wisdom of Providence.
IX. The duties we owe to Providence.

The explication of these things will not only answer many difficulties in Providence, but will give us a clearer notion of the divine attributes and of some of the principal duties of religion.

CHAPTER I.

THE NECESSARY CONNECTION BETWEEN THE BELIEF OF A GOD AND OF A PROVIDENCE.

INSTEAD of other arguments to prove a Providence, I shall at present insist only on this, that the belief of a God infers a Providence; that if we believe there is a God who made the world, we must believe that the same God who made the world does govern it too.

1. For, first, it is as absurd and unreasonable to think that the world is governed by chance as to think that it was made by chance; for chance can no more govern than it can make the world.

One principal act of Providence is to uphold all things in being, to preserve their natures, powers, operations; to make this lower world again every year by new productions. For nature seems to decay, and die, and revive again in almost as wonderful a manner and as unintelligible to us, as it was first made. Now, though it is very absurd to say that chance, which acts by no rule nor with any counsel or design, can make a world, which has all the marks and characters of an admirable wisdom in its contrivance—yet, it seems more absurd to say that chance can preserve, that it can uphold the things it has made; that it can repair the decays of nature, nay, restore it when it seems

lost: that it can not only do the same thing twice, but repeat it infinitely in new productions: that chance can give laws to nature and impose a necessity on it to act regularly and uniformly, that is, that chance should put an end to chance, and introduce necessity and fate.* Were there not a wise and powerful Providence, it is ten thousand times more likely that chance should unmake and dissolve the world, than that it should at first make it; for a world that came together by chance, and has nothing to keep it together but the chance that made it, which is as uncertain and mutable as chance is, will quickly unmake itself. Should the sun but change his place, come nearer this earth, or remove farther from it, there were an end of this lower world; and if it were placed there by chance, it is wonderful that in so many ages some new unlucky chance has not removed it. And therefore the Psalmist attributes not only the creation but the preservation of all things to God. "Praise him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars and light. Praise him, all ye heavens, and ye waters that are above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord; for he spake the word and they were made; he commanded, and they were created. He hath made them fast for ever and ever; he hath given them a law which shall not be broken." Ps. cxlviii. 3—6.

2. The same wisdom and power which made the world, must govern it too: it is only a creating power that can preserve. That which owes its very being to power, must depend upon the power that made it; for it can have no principle of self-subsistence independent on its cause. It is only creating wisdom that perfectly understands the natures of all things, that sees all the springs of motion, that can correct the errors of nature, that can suspend or direct the influences of natural causes, that can govern hearts, change men's purposes, inspire wisdom and counsel, restrain or let loose their passions. It is only an infinite mind that

* Casu inquis? itane vero? quidquam potest casu esse factum, quod omnes in se habeat numeros veritatis? quartuor tali jacti casu venereum efficiunt, num etiam centum venereos si 400 talos ejeceris, casu futuros putas?——Sic enim se perfecto res habet, ut nunquam perfecte veritatem casus imitetur.—*Cicero de Divinat.* l. 1.

can take care of all the world, that can allot every creature its portion, that can adjust the interests of states and kingdoms, that can bring good out of evil, and order out of confusion. In a word, the government of the world requires such wisdom and such power as no being has but he who made it; and therefore, if the world be governed, it must be governed by the Maker of it.

3. If there be any such being as we call God, a pure, infinite, eternal mind, it is a demonstration that he must govern the world.

Those who deny a Providence will not allow that God sees or takes notice of what is done here below. The Epicureans, though in civility and compliment to the superstition of mankind, rather than from a real belief and sense of a Deity, they did own a God, nay, a great many gods, such as they were, yet never allowed their gods to know any thing of our affairs, which would have disturbed their profound ease and rest, the sole happiness of the lazy, inactive, Epicurean deities; and this secured them from the fear of their gods, who lived at a great distance from them, and knew nothing concerning them.*

And in the same manner this is represented in Scripture, that wicked men would not believe that God saw, or heard, or took any notice of what they did; Psalm lxiv. 5: "They encourage themselves in an evil matter, they commune of laying snares secretly; they say, who shall see them?" Psalm x. 11: "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten, he hideth his face, he will never see it. Psalm xciv. 7—10: "Yet they say, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Understand ye brutish among the people, and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? And he that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? And he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity." So that these men took it for granted, that if God did see, and hear, and know what was done in the world, he would reward men accordingly. And

* Immortali ævo summa cum pace fruatur.
Semota a nostris rebus, seunctaque longe.

therefore, the Providence of God is described in Scripture by his seeing and observing the actions of men. Job xxxi. 4: "Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps?" Psalm xxxiii. 18, 19: "Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy," that is, to protect them, and to do good to them; as it follows: "to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine." And, therefore, when good men pray for help and succor, they only beg God to see and take notice of their condition. Lam. i. 11: "See, O Lord, and consider, for I am become vile." Isa. lxiv. 9: "Behold, see we beseech thee, we are all thy people." Thus, in Hezekiah's prayer, "Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see, and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God." And, therefore, God's seeing is made an argument that he will reward or punish. Psalm x. 14: "Thou hast seen it, for thou beholdest mischief and spite to requite it with thy hand." And, indeed, it is not to be imagined, that a holy and just God, who sees and observes all the good and evil that is done in the world, should not reward the good, and punish the wicked; for there is no other holy and just Being in the world, that has authority to reward and punish, but would certainly do it. And if the proof of a Divine Providence be resolved into God's knowing, what is done in the world, the dispute will be soon ended; for those who believe that there is a God, and that he is an infinite, omnipresent Mind, cannot doubt whether he sees and knows all things. As the Psalmist elegantly expresses it, Psalm cxxxix. 1—13: "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising; thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying-down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If

I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me; yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee; for thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb." How is it possible that an omnipresent mind should be ignorant of any thing, or that the maker of the world should not be present with all his creatures: or that, being present and seeing all their actions, he should be an idle and unconcerned spectator?

4. For I think, in the next place, it is past all dispute, that he who made the world cannot be unconcerned for his creatures. He hath implanted in most creatures a natural care of their offspring; and it is made an argument of want of understanding in the ostrich, that "she leaveth her eggs in the earth and warmeth them in the dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as if they were not hers. Her labour is in vain without fear, because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding:" Job xxxix. 15—17. And can we think, then, that an infinitely wise Being should be as unconcerned for the world as the ostrich is for her eggs?

It is certain the Maker of the world is no sluggish, unactive being; for, to make a world is a work of infinite wisdom and counsel, of divine art and power; and not only to give being to that which was not, is itself an act of excellent goodness, but there are so many legible characters of a divine bounty and goodness stamped upon all the works of nature, that we must conclude the world was made by an infinitely good being; and it is impossible that a wise and good being, who is a pure act and perfect life, can cast off the care of his creatures. Besides the laws of God and men, natural affection will not suffer men to forget their children; and though God has no superior, his own nature is a law to himself.

This is sufficient to show how necessarily the belief of a God infers a Providence, and therefore no philosophers, ex-

cepting Epicurus and his sect, who acknowledged a Deity, ever denied a Providence; and Tully tells us that he retained the name of a God, but destroyed his being.*

The Stoic, in Tully, concludes a Providence from the acknowledgment of a God,† and therefore tells us that Providence signifies the Providence of God;‡ and those philosophers made no scruple of calling God Providence and Fate, and the power of an eternal and perpetual law.§ For indeed mankind had no other notion of a God than that he is an excellent and perfect being, who made and who governs the world.‖ This is the notion which the philosophers who acknowledged a Deity defended against Epicurus and other atheists; this is the notion of a God which atheists oppose, the God whom they fear, an eternal Lord who observes and takes notice of every thing, and thinks himself concerned in all the affairs of the world.¶ And therefore the dispute whether there be a God or no, principally resolves itself into this, whether this world and all things in it are made and governed by wisdom and counsel, or by chance and a blind material necessity and fate; which proves that the very notion of God includes a Providence, or else either to prove or to overthrow the doctrine of Providence would neither prove nor overthrow the being of a God.

This, I am sure, is very plain, that the same arguments which prove the being of a God, prove a Providence. If the beauty, variety, usefulness, and wise contrivance of the works of nature prove that the world was at first made by a wise and powerful being; the continuance and preserva-

* Epicurum verbis reliquisse Deos, re sustulisse.—*De Nat. Deor.* l. 2.

† Quo concesso confitendum est eorum Consilio mundum administrari.—*De Nat. Deor.* l. 2.

‡ Providentia præcise dicitur pro Providentia Deorum.—*Ibid.*

§ Chrysippus Legis perpetuæ et æternæ vim, quæ quasi dux vitæ, et Ministra Officiorum sit, Jovem dicit esse, eandemque fatalem necessitatem.—*Ibid.* l. 1.

‖ Aliquam excellentum esse et prestantem naturam, quæ hæc fecisset, moveret, regeret, gubernaret.—*Ibid.*

¶ Imposuistis in cervicibus nostris sempiternum Dominum, quem dies et noctes timeremus; quis enim non timeat omnia providentem. et cogitantem. et animadvertentem, et omnia ad se pertinere putantem, curiosum, et plenum negotii Deum.—*Ibid.*

tion of all things, the regular motions of the heavens, the uniform productions of nature, prove the world is upheld, directed, and governed by the same omnipotent wisdom and counsel. As St. Paul tells us, "the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead," Rom. i. 20, Θειότης, his dominion and sovereignty, or his governing Providence; this visible world does not only prove an eternal power which made it, but a sovereign Lord, who administers all the affairs of it. And Acts xiv. 17, he proves the being of God from his Providence: "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And Acts xvii. 28, he proves that God governs the world, and takes care of all the creatures that are in it, because he made it: "For in him we live and move and have our being, as certain of your own poets have said; for we are also his offspring:" which is very improperly alleged by St. Paul, if we may be the offspring of God, and yet not live and move, and have our being in him; that is, if God's making the world does not necessarily prove his constant care and government of it. But the apostle knew in those days, that no man who confessed that God made the world, questioned his Providence, and therefore makes no scruple to prove that we live and subsist in God, because he made us.

This is a noble argument to prove both the being and Providence of God, (which cannot be separated,) from the works of nature and the wise government of the world. It would give us a delightful entertainment to view all the curiosities and surprising wonders of nature. With what beauty, art, and contrivance particular creatures are made, and how the several parts of this great machine are fitted to each other, and make a regular and uniform world; how all particular creatures are fitted to the use and purposes of their several natures, and yet are made serviceable to one another, and have as mutual a connection and dependence as the wheels of a clock. What an equal and steady hand governs the world when its motions seem most eccentric and exorbitant, and brings good out of evil, and order out

of confusion, when things are so perplexed that it is impossible for any one but a God to disentangle them.

There is no need of the subtlety of reason and argument in this cause, would men but attentively study the works of God, and dwell in the contemplation of nature and Providence; for God is as visible in his works as the sun is by his light. When all the wonders of nature are unfolded and exposed particularly to our view, it so overpowers the mind with such infinite varieties of that most divine art and wisdom, that modest men are ashamed to ascribe such things to a blind chance, which has no design or counsel.

Indeed, to say that a world full of infinite marks and characters of the most admirable art, a world so made that no art could make it better, was not made by a wise mind, but by chance, by a fortuitous concourse of atoms, which, without any design, after infinite fruitless trials, happened into this exact, useful, beautiful order that now they are in, know when they are well, and in despite of chance, move as constantly, regularly, artificially, in all new productions, as the divinest and most uniform wisdom could direct: I say, to affirm this, is to put an end to all disputes, by leaving no principle of reason and argumentation to dispute with.

An atheist is the most vain pretender to reason in the world. The whole strength of atheism consists in contradicting the universal reason of mankind. They have no principles, nor can have any, and therefore they can never reason, but only confidently deny or affirm. They can assign no principles of reason which the rest of mankind allow to be principles, from whence they can prove there is no God, and no Providence; but they only reject those principles which all other men agree in, and from whence it must necessarily follow, that there is a God and Providence.

It will be of great use briefly to explain this, which will teach you to reject atheism and atheists, without troubling yourselves to dispute with them; for they have no common principles with the rest of mankind to reason upon, nor indeed any principles of reason at all.

A few words will suffice for this purpose. Mankind who have been used to thinking and reasoning, have universally

agreed that there must be something that had no beginning and no cause; for nothing can produce nothing; that had there ever been a time when there was nothing, there never could have been any thing, unless there can be an effect without a cause, which is too absurd for atheists themselves to say in express words, who do not boggle much at absurdities; and therefore they make their atoms, and their vacuum to be eternal. It is agreed, also, that whatever had a beginning had a cause; and the most easy and natural progress of human understandings is to reason from one cause to another, till we ascend to, and centre in a first cause. For it is as easy and natural to believe one first eternal cause, as to believe an eternal being; but though it is natural to believe something eternal, it is as unnatural to believe all things to be so. We have no notion of all things being eternal, though we have of an eternal cause. For the very reason why we are forced to confess something eternal is because there must be an eternal cause of all other things; that is, because all things are not eternal. But if any thing which has not an eternal and unchangeable nature, but is capable of being made and unmade, changed and altered, as all the things of this world are, might be without a cause, then every thing may be without a cause. And if the eternity of all things be a natural notion, it cannot be a natural notion that there is a first cause. For that very notion supposes that something had a beginning, and was originally made when it was not before, and therefore that all things are not eternal. For to be *made*, in this axiom, primarily relates to the being of things, and is so understood by all men. And how can such a notion of the making and giving being to any thing be natural, if it be a natural notion that all things are eternal, and that nothing was made?

Hence it is that seen and visible effects which have no visible cause adequate to the producing such effects, are allowed by all mankind to be a sufficient proof of some invisible cause, as St. Paul tells us, and he spoke the language of human nature in it: That "the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made," Rom. i. 20. For if that which is made must have a cause, f there be no visible

cause there must be an invisible maker, and therefore this world which has no visible, must have an invisible cause.

And as it is natural to the reason of mankind to conclude the cause from the effect, so is it to learn the nature of the cause from the nature of the effect; for whatever is in the effect, must be either specifically or virtually in the cause. For whatever is in the effect, which is not in the cause, that has no cause, for nothing can be a cause of that which is not itself. And therefore whatever has life and understanding must be made by a living and understanding cause. Whatever has art, and skill, and wise contrivance in its frame, as every worm and fly has, must have a wise designing cause for its maker; and then it is certain that this whole world was not made by chance, or the fortuitous concourse of atoms, but by an infinitely wise mind. This way of reasoning is easy and natural to our minds; all men understand it, all men feel it. Atheists themselves allow of this kind of proof in all other cases excepting the proof of a God or a Providence; and therefore it is no absurd, foolish way of reasoning, for then it must not be allowed of in any case; and they have no reason to reject it in this case, but that they are resolved not to believe a God and a Providence. And yet this way of reasoning from effects to causes must be good in all cases or in none; for the principle is universal that nothing can be made without a cause; and if any thing can be made without a cause, this principle is false and can prove nothing. And I challenge the wisest and subtlest atheist of them all, to prove from any principle of reason, that the most beautiful and regular house that he ever saw, which he did not see built, (for that is a proof from sense, not from reason,) was built by men, and is a work of art, and that it did not either grow out of the earth nor was made by the accidental meeting of the several materials, which, without knowledge, art, or design, fell into a regular uniform building. Had these men never seen a house built, I would desire to know how they would prove that it is a work of art, built by a skilful workman, and not by chance. And by what medium soever they will prove this, I will undertake to prove that God made the world, though we did not see him make it.

But the present inquiry is only this, whether this be human reason, the natural reason of human minds? If it be, then men who will be contented to reason like men must acknowledge and assent to this argument from effects to causes, which unavoidably proves a God and Providence. And this is all that I desire to be granted, that those who will follow the notices and principles of human reason must believe that God made and governs the world; for I know not how to reason beyond human reason; those who do may please themselves with it.

Those who have found out a reason which contradicts the natural principles of reason, must reason with themselves, for mankind cannot reason with them.

But let us consider how atheists reason when they have laid aside this principle of reason from effects to causes.

They tell us that a most artificial world may be made without art or any wise maker, by blind chance, without any designing efficient cause—that life, and sense, and reason may result from dead, stupid, senseless atoms. Well, we hear this and bear it as patiently as we can. But how do they prove this? Why, they say it *may be*, and they can go no further. But how do they know this *may be*? have they any such notion in their minds? have they any natural sensation that answers these words? does nature teach them that any thing can be without a cause adequate to the effect? that any thing can be wisely made without a wise cause? that one contrary can produce the other? that senseless stupid matter can produce life, sensation and understanding? Can they then tell me what it is that *can't be*? I desire to know by what rule they judge what *may be*, and what *can't be;* and if they can find any *can't be* more absurd and contradictious than their *may be*, I will renounce sense and reason for ever. If nothing can be without a cause, according to the reason of mankind, this can't be, and therefore all that their *may be's* can signify is this, that if the reason of mankind deceive us, such things *may be* as the most unquestionable principles of reason tells us *can't be*. And this is the glorious triumph of atheistical reason; it can get no further than *a may be*, and such *a may be* as is absolutely impossible, if the reason of mankind be true.

Set aside the relation between causes and effects, and all the arguments from causes to effects, and from effects to causes, and there is an end of all knowledge; and set aside all those first principles and maxims of reason which all men assent to at the first proposal, the truth of which they see and feel, and there is an end of all reason: for there can be no reasoning without the acknowledgment of some first principles, which the mind has a clear, distinct, and vigorous perception of: and if men will distrust their own minds in such things as they have an easy, natural perception of, and prefer some arbitrary notions, which seem absurd contradictions and impossible to the rest of mankind, and which they can have no idea of beyond the sound of words,—they may be atheists if they please, at the expense of their reason and understanding, that is, they may be atheists if they will not judge and reason like men. But if we are as certain of the being of a God and of a Providence as we are *that nothing can be without a cause*, we have all the certainty that human nature is capable of.

CHAPTER II.

THE GENERAL NOTION OF PROVIDENCE, AND PARTICULARLY CONCERNING A PRESERVING PROVIDENCE.

Having proved as largely as my present design required, that the same God who made the world is the supreme Lord and Governor of it, I proceed to consider the nature of Providence.

The general notion of Providence is God's care of all the creatures he has made, which must consist in preserving and upholding their beings and natures, and in such acts of government as the good order of the world and the happiness of mankind require; which divides Providence into preservation and government, which must be carefully distinguished in order to answer some great difficulties in Providence.

I begin with *preserving Providence*, which commences

from the first instant of the creation; for as soon as creatures are made, they need a divine power to preserve them. For this is the strict notion of preservation, as distinguished from a governing Providence, that God upholds all things in being from falling back into their first notion, and preserves their natural virtues, powers and faculties, and enables them to act, and to attain the ends of their several natures; which distinguishes this preserving Providence from those many acts of preservation which belong to government, such as preserving the lives of men from unseen accidents and visible dangers; nay, of beasts and birds too, as our Saviour assures us, "that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father," Matt. x. 29: in which sense the Psalmist tells us, that God "preserves both man and beasts," supplies them with food and all other things necessary to life, and preserves their lives from violence or accident as long as he sees fit.

This preservation, as distinguished from government, St. Paul expressly teaches. "For in him we live, and move, and have our being:" Acts xvii. 28. We were not only made by him, but we live, and move, and have our being in him: as the apostle to the Hebrews tells us of Christ, that "he upholds all things by the word of his power:" Heb. i. 3.

The schools have divided this into two distinct acts, 1. God's upholding and preserving the being and natures of all things; 2. His co-operating with all creatures, and, by a perpetual influx and concourse, actuating their natural powers to perform their natural actions; that is, that we *have our being in him*, and that *we live, and move, and act in him*, or by a new influx of power from him.

As for the first, the preservation of all things in being, besides those texts of scripture which expressly attribute this to God, the schools urge several arguments for the proof of it, which I think may be resolved into this one, that whatever does not necessarily exist by the internal principles of its own nature, must depend on its cause, not only for its being, but for its continuance and preservation; for there is no medium between necessary existence and dependence on its cause.

The very notion of a creature does not only include in it *its being made*, but *its dependence on its Maker for its continuance in being;* for whatever does not necessarily exist, must not only be made at first, but must be upheld and preserved in being; for it can no more preserve than it can make itself. It was nothing once, and what was once nothing may be nothing again, and therefore cannot subsist of itself, but in dependence on its Maker.

It is not with the being and natures of things, as it is with the works of art, which, though they cannot make themselves, yet, when they are made, can subsist without the artist that made them. As a house cannot build itself, but when it is built, it continues of itself as long as the materials and workmanship last, when the workman has left it; for the workman does not give being to the materials, but only to the form, which subsists in the matter, and that in its first cause; but whatever receives its being from another, as all creatures do, has nothing to support its being, but the cause that made it.

This is so certain, that I should make no scruple to say, that God can no more make an independent creature which can subsist without him, than he can make an eternal creature which shall have no beginning; which is not want of power in God, but a repugnancy and contradiction in the nature of creatures. That which once was not, can never be so made as to have no beginning; that which has not a necessary existence, as nothing has, which once was not, can not be made to exist necessarily without dependence on its cause; because necessary existence is not in its nature, for then it would always have been.

Suarez has another argument to prove the dependence of creatures on the perpetual influx of power from the first cause, which possibly some may think only a school of subtlety, but seems to me to have great weight in it; and it proceeds upon this supposition, (which all men must grant,) that if God made the world out of nothing, he could annihilate all things, and reduce them into nothing again, if he so pleased. Now, he says, that annihilation is not an act of power, for all positive acts of power must have some real and positive effect; whereas to annihilate is to make no-

thing, and therefore do nothing. Now, if to annihilate be an act of power, then it can be nothing else but a withdrawing that power which supported all things in being; and that proves, that all things are upheld in being by the divine power if they cannot subsist, but fall into nothing again when that upholding and preserving power is withdrawn.

This is a very sensible argument, if we distinguish between what we call destroying and annihilating, which is apt to confound us in this matter. To destroy, is only to change the present form and compages of things, while the matter and substance continue the same. Thus God destroyed the old world by water, and will destroy this world by fire again, which is like pulling down a house without destroying the materials, and this is an act of power and has a positive effect. But to annihilate is to reduce something to nothing, which is to do nothing, and therefore is no act of power, but only a cessation of power. And if not to uphold is to annihilate, then all things subsist, as well as are made, by the power of God.

I shall only add, that God cannot make a creature independent of itself, without bestowing on it a self-subsisting nature or necessary existence; for whatever does not necessarily exist by the internal principles of its nature, must depend on something else to uphold it in being. Now, besides what I observed before, that whatever necessarily exists cannot be made, but must be eternal, (for that which exists necessarily, must always exist, without a cause and without a beginning; for nothing can begin to have a necessarily self-subsisting nature,) I now add, that whatever necessarily is, cannot be changed, destroyed, annihilated; for whatever necessarily is, necessarily is what it is: which proves, that if God can annihilate whatever he has made, then all things subsist by the will, and pleasure, and power of God, not by the internal principles of their natures; for whatever necessarily exists can never be annihilated, for that is a contradiction.

How God upholds all things in being, we no more know than how at first he made all things when there was nothing, and therefore it is a vain inquiry of the schools, which no man can resolve and which serves no end in religion, whe-

ther creation and preservation be the same or two different acts?—Whether preservation be a continued creation, or whether they be two distinct and different acts of power, to make and to preserve? For how can any man know this, who neither knows how God creates nor how he preserves? Thus much is certain, that to create is to give being to that which was not before; to preserve, is to continue that in being which was made before; and when any thing is once created, it can never be newly created, till it falls into nothing again: for to create is to make out of nothing, not to make a thing which already is. But by what acts of power either of these is done, we cannot tell, nor are we concerned to know; for what way soever this is done, we equally depend on God—we live and subsist in him.

But there is one thing fit to be observed, that this act of preservation, which consists in upholding all things in being, is fixed by a perpetual and unchangeable decree; that though God will dissolve this present frame of things, and, it may be, cast the world into a new mould, yet nothing that is made, neither matter nor spirit, shall be annihilated or reduced into nothing again. This, I think, we may safely conclude from the promises and threatenings of eternal rewards and punishments, which supposes that both good and bad men shall live for ever—the one to be happy, the other to be miserable to eternity; and then we may reasonably conclude, that the world, whatever changes it may suffer, will continue as long as the inhabitants of it do.

This is the first act of what we call preserving Providence to uphold all things in being, in distinction, as I observed before, from those several acts of preservation which concern a governing Providence.

A second act of preserving providence is what the schools call God's co-operation and concourse with creatures in all their actions, that we not only live and have our being, but that we move in God; that whatever we do we do by a natural power received from God; and this is as certain as that we have our being in him; for if we live, we must move in him.

But then whether God's co-operation and concourse be a different act from his preserving the natural virtues and

powers of action, is a nicer and more intricate speculation, and neither the thing nor the reason of it is easy to be conceived. Natural powers are internal principles of action when a creature acts from an inward principle of nature; but if these natural powers, while they are preserved in their full force and vigour by God, can do nothing themselves without a new extrinsic determining motion from God, then they seem to be no natural powers, for they cannot act by nature if this be true. The fire don't burn by nature, for though God preserves its nature it cannot burn without some new co-operating power which is not in its nature. A man don't reason and judge, choose and refuse, by nature; for though God preserve his natural powers and faculties of understanding and will, yet he can neither understand nor will unless he be moved, acted, determined by God. This seems to make the world a mere apparition and empty scene, which has nothing real. Whatever we see done in the world is not done by creatures who seem to do it; for they are only acted like machines, nor from the internal principles and powers of nature, but from external motion. But God does every thing himself by an immediate power, even all the contradictions and contrarieties we see in the world.

This is a very great difficulty which I will not undertake to determine one way or other; but thus much I think we may safely say, that if we will attribute any thing to creatures, if we will allow that they ever act from a principle of nature, we must confess that God co-operates only to the natural power of action; that is, that he only enables them to act according to their natures, without changing, influencing, determining their natures otherwise than these powers would naturally act. For this is all that is necessary to action when God has created the natural powers, and this is all the co-operation that can belong to God as the maker and preserver of all things.

Whatever is more than this, as I acknowledge there is a great deal more that God does, it belongs to a governing, not to a preserving providence. God does a great deal more than merely co-operate with our natural powers *to perform natural actions*, but this he does as a governor,

not merely as a preserver, the not distinguishing of which has occasioned great mistakes in the doctrine of Providence, as to show this briefly.

God has endowed all creatures with such natural powers and virtues as may answer the end for which they were made. He has made the sun to shine to enlighten and refresh the world—the fire to burn, the earth to bring forth all sorts of herbs, and grass, and corn, and fruit—the vapours to ascend out of the earth to purge and fan the air with winds, and to fall down again in fruitful showers—every herb and flower and tree has its peculiar seeds to propagate its kind, as all living creatures have.

Now as it had been to little purpose for God to have made a world without upholding it in being, for creatures can no more preserve than they can make themselves; so it had been to as little purpose to have endowed all creatures with such virtues and powers as belong to their several natures, without such a natural co-operation, whatever that may be, as shall enable their natural powers to act and to attain the ends of their natures; and therefore God established this natural concourse and co-operation to actuate all the powers of nature, by a perpetual law, which is that blessing God bestowed upon all creatures at the time of the creation. For though this blessing, to increase and multiply, and to replenish the sea and air and earth, which preserves and invigorates the powers of nature, be expressed only of living creatures, the fish, and fowls, and birds, and men,—yet it equally belongs to the whole creation, as will be easily granted, and makes nature regular and constant in all its motions and productions.

But there are other acts belonging to God's government even of the material world, as I shall show you more hereafter, as to direct the virtues and influences of nature, or to suspend and restrain them—to make the earth fruitful or barren, the air wholesome or pestilential—to withdraw the dews and showers of heaven, or to give the former and latter rain in its season—to cause it to rain upon one city and not upon another, and so to temper the influences of nature as to punish the wickedness or to reward the obedience of mankind. These are acts of government,

and of a quite different kind from actuating the powers of nature to attain their ends, and to do what they were made for.

Thus to consider the rational world, God has endowed man with the natural faculties of understanding and will, to judge and to choose for himself; and he preserves these faculties, and gives them a natural power to act, to understand, and will. But this natural co-operation of God can extend no farther than to the natural power of acting, not to any specifical acts. It does not improve any man's understanding, nor incline his judgment, nor determine his choice: it makes no alteration in the powers of nature, but only enables them to act according to their natures; it is only like winding up a clock, which puts it into motion, but gives no new preternatural motions to it, but leaves its motions to be guided by its own springs and wheels. Whatever this co-operation of God be, which is thought necessary to actuate our natural faculties, it gives no new bias to us, but leaves us perfectly in a state of nature, and only enables us to do that which we should do of ourselves, without any such co-operation of God, could we act without it.

But in the government of mankind, God exercises a very different power over the minds of men. He changes the hearts and counsels of men, imprints new thoughts upon their minds, claps a new bias upon their wills and affections. The hearts of princes are in his hands, and he turneth them as rivers of waters. He renews and sanctifies good men by his Spirit; enlightens their understandings, changes their wills, inspires them with divine affections. He gives up bad men to the impostures of wicked spirits, to their own affected ignorance, blindness, inconsideration; to the obstinacy and perverseness of their own wills, and to the empire of their lusts. Every one must perceive that this is a very different thing from God's co-operation with our natural faculties to will and to understand; for that makes no change in our natural understandings and wills, but only enables them to act; but this improves and heightens, and regulates our faculties—enlarges our knowledge, and rectifies our choice, and directs and governs our passions.

And yet these things have not been well distinguished, which has very much obscured and perplexed the doctrines both of Providence and Grace, as I shall now show you.

For having thus briefly explained the difference between a preserving and governing Providence, that this may not be thought a more subtle than useful speculation, it will be necessary to show you of what great use this is to answer some of the greatest difficulties in the doctrine of Providence.

Now as the foundation of all, I shall ask but one thing which every man must grant: that it becomes God to preserve the creatures he has made, to uphold them in being, and to actuate their natural powers as far as is necessary to enable creatures to perform those natural actions which their natures are fitted and made for. If it became the wisdom and goodness of God to make creatures with such powers and faculties of acting, it becomes him also to preserve their beings and natures and powers of action. To make, is to give a being and nature to that which was nothing; to preserve, is only to continue its being and to enable it to act according to its nature; and therefore we must either approve or disapprove of both alike.

Let us then lay down this as an acknowledged principle, that we must not quarrel with the Providence of God for any thing which is a mere act of preservation, not an act of government. For to uphold the being, and nature, and operations of all things is no fault, whatever evil consequences may attend it; and therefore those who have a mind to quarrel at Providence, must find some fault, if they can, in God's government of creatures, not in the acts of preservation; and this easily answers some of the most difficult objections against Providence, as for instance—

Since no creature can move, or act, or do any thing, without the concourse and co-operation of God, some are wonderfully puzzled to give an account why God should co-operate with any creature in sinful actions—why God should actuate men's understandings and wills, and their other natural powers and faculties, when he certainly knows

that if he enables them to act, they will act wickedly, they will choose that which is wicked, and will execute their wicked designs—that if they have the exercise of their natural powers, they will defile themselves with adultery, and drunkenness, and theft, or murder, and all manner of wickedness: and how can a holy God co-operate in all the wickedness which is committed? When men do wickedly by the power and co-operation of God, without which they can do nothing, how does the sin come to be the man's when the action is God's, as done by his immediate power?

I shall not trouble you with other answers, which are commonly given to this difficulty; for what I have now discoursed, gives a plain and easy solution to it. For all this, however it be represented, comes to no more than God's preserving the natures of creatures, and actuating their natural powers to perform the offices of nature; and if this be such a fault as entitles God to all the wickedness they commit, the original fault is in making such creatures; for if it were no fault to make them, it can be no fault to preserve their natures. Does it become the wisdom of God to make creatures, who must act dependently on himself, and to deny them the natural powers of acting, which is to unmake them again? And if this does not become the wisdom of God, then it can be no fault in God to co-operate with the natural powers of men, even in their sinful actions, nor any more entitle God to their sins, than his making creatures with such natural powers; for to preserve their natures, and to actuate their natural powers, is no more a cause of their sin, than to make such natures and such natural powers.

To represent this as plainly as I can, let us suppose that God had created man with a natural power to act without needing such a perpetual concourse and co-operation to enable him to act, would this charge God with the sins of men because they act, even when they sin, by a power derived from him in their first creation? If this makes God the author of sin, then God cannot make a creature who is capable of sinning by the abuse of its natural powers, without being the author of sin, which is too absurd for any think-

ing man to say; and yet if it does not, how does God's perpetual concourse and co-operation with creatures to enable them to act and to exert their natural powers make God the author of sin? for this is no more than a natural power to act, and it makes no difference whether this natural power be given once for all, as an inherent power in creatures, or be supplied every minute, for both ways the power is the same and equally derived from God. And if the natural power of acting charges God with men's sins, the charge lies equally against a creating and co-operating power; if it does not, God is no more chargeable with sin for co-operating with men's natural powers in every action, than he would be for creating such natural powers as could act of themselves.

God's government of the world must be fitted to the natures of the creatures which he has made, without denying them the natural powers of action; and therefore, while he co-operates with creatures only to act according to the liberty of their own natures, this is no fault in his government, nor contributes any thing more to the sins of creatures than preserving their natures, which as much becomes God as it did to make them.

Thus some think it a great blemish to Providence that adulterous mixtures prove fruitful, when *increase and multiply* is an established decree from the first creation, and the settled course and order of nature must not be reversed by the sins of men. They may as well object against Providence that a man who steals his neighbour's grain and sows it in his own land should have a plentiful crop the next year from his stolen seed. And whatever opinion men may have concerning the origination of the soul, whether it be propagated *ex traduce*, or did pre-exist, or be immediately created by God and infused into prepared matter, it makes no difference in the case; for when the order of nature is settled and the blessing pronounced and established by the divine decree, it does not unbecome God to preserve the powers of nature to produce their natural effects. I am sure there want not wise reasons in God's government of the world why it should be so to restrain some men's lusts, and to shame and punish others.

Nay, I believe whoever considers this matter well, will acknowledge that it goes a great way in answering the greatest difficulty of all, *viz.* the eternal punishments of wicked men in the next world.

The objection is not against God's punishing wicked men in the next world; for nobody pretends that this is unjust for God to punish the wicked whether in this world or in the next.

Nor is the objection against the nature of these punishments —for indeed we do not distinctly know what they are, no more than we know what the happiness of heaven is. Those descriptions our Saviour gives of them, *of lakes of fire and brimstone, blackness of darkness, the worm that never dieth, and the fire that never goeth out*, prove that they are very great, because these descriptions are intended to present to us very frightful and terrible images of the miseries of the damned. But this is not the complaint neither, for it is confessed that wicked men deserve to be very miserable.

But the objection is against that vast disproportion between time and eternity. How it is reconcilable with the divine justice to punish temporal sins with eternal miseries. That when men can sin but for a very few years' they must suffer for it for ever.

Now the difficulty of this seems in part to be owing to a misstating the case. There is no proportion indeed between time and eternity, and it is therefore difficult to conceive that every momentary sin should, in its own nature, deserve eternal punishments. But there is no difficulty to conceive that an immortal sinner may, by some short and momentary sins, sink himself into an irrecoverable state of misery, and then he must be miserable as long as he continues to be; and if he can never die, he must be always miserable, and may be so without any injustice in God. We do not here consider the proportion between the continuance of the sin and the punishment, between a short transient act and eternal punishments; for it is not the sin but the sinner that is punished for his sin; and therefore we must not ask how long punishment a short sin deserves, but how long the sinner deserves to be punished? and the answer to that is

easy, as long as he is a sinner; and therefore an immortal sinner who can never die, and who will never cease to be wicked, (which is the hopeless and irrecoverable state of devils and damned spirits,) must always be miserable, and it is just it should be so if it be just to punish sinners; and there is nothing to quarrel with God for, as to the eternity of punishments, unless it be that he does not annihilate immortal spirits when they are become incurably wicked and miserable. The justice of God is only concerned to punish sinners; that their punishments are eternal is a necessary consequence of their immortality, and this cannot be charged on God unless it be a fault to make immortal creatures, and to preserve and uphold immortal creatures in being, or to punish sinners while they deserve punishment, that is while they are sinners.

It may give some light to this matter to remove the scene into this world. We see the punishment of sin in this world bears no proportion to the time of committing it, but to the lasting effects of the sin. One short, single act of lust may not only leave a lasting reproach on men's names, but destroy the health and ease of their bodies and the pleasure of their lives for ever in this world; and had men continued immortal after the fall, these miserable effects must have continued for ever, and then there had been a visible eternal punishment for a very short transient sin, and yet no man would have blamed the justice of God for it; which shows that a sin which is quickly committed may be eternally punished, and that very justly, too, when the effects of it are incurable and the person immortal. And thus it is in a great many other cases in this world where the effects of sin last as long as the men last. And if this be the case of the other world, and of the miseries and punishments of the damned, as we certainly know in a great measure it is, that their punishments are the natural effects and consequences of their sins, there can be no objection against the eternity of their punishments, but that God does not annihilate them; and how hard soever any man may think it to be, that a sinner should be eternally miserable, I believe that no man will venture to say that God ought in justice to annihilate creatures whom he has made immortal, when by their own

fault they must be eternally miserable if they live for ever. To preserve and uphold creatures in being, is in itself considered what becomes the wise maker of all things, and I am sure there can be no reason given to prove that God ought to annihilate sinners to prevent their being miserable for ever, but what will much more prove that God ought to have withdrawn his natural concourse from his creatures, or to have annihilated them to prevent their sinning; or which is the last result of all, as I have already observed, and the only fault, if there be one, that he ought not to have made an immortal creature who could sin, and be miserable for ever.

I shall conclude this whole argument with some few inferences.

1. If creatures must be preserved as well as made by God, then the present continuance and preservation of all things is a visible argument of the being of God. Some men will not believe that God made the world, because they did not see him make it. But they see a world preserved, when there is no one thing in the world more able to preserve than to make itself. And who then is it that preserves this world and all things in it? This must be a work of reason and wisdom as well as power, and the only reasonable creature in this visible world is man; and man cannot preserve himself, and knows that he can preserve nothing else—and therefore the preservation of all things must be owing to some invisible cause whom we call GOD.

2. If we live, and move and have our being in God, we are entirely his and owe all homage and obedience to him; for he did not only make us, but we have our constant dependence on him—we live and subsist in him. Had he only made us at first, that had given him a title to us for ever; but could we have lived without him when he had made us, though it had not been a less fault, yet it had been less foolish and absurd to have lived without any notice or regard of him, as some ungrateful persons deal by their friends and patrons when they have set them up in the world and enabled them to live by themselves. But to forget that God in whom we live, who preserves and upholds us in being every moment, is to affront a present benefactor

if we value being; and though we cannot tempt God by this to let us fall into nothing, yet we shall make it just for him to punish us, to preserve us in being, to feel the weight of his wrath and vengeance, which is infinitely worse; for "happy had it been for such a man that he had never been born."

3. For if he not only made but upholds and preserves us in being, he must be our sovereign Lord and governor, for no other has any original and absolute interest in us. We are in his hands and none can take us out of them, nor touch us but by his order. To give being and to preserve it is the foundation of all other acts of government; no other being has a right to govern—no other power can govern. He alone can give laws, can reward or punish, can govern nature, can direct, overrule, control all other powers, for all things are in his hands, and therefore he commands them all.

4. And this may convince us how irresistible the divine power is. For all the power of creatures is derived from him and depends on him as light does on the sun, and therefore they can have no power against him. And what distraction then is it to provoke that Almighty God whom we cannot resist? Humble thyself, sinner, before thy maker, thy preserver, and thy judge; obey his will, to whose power thou must submit. Let him be thy fear and thy dread; thy only fear, for thou needest fear none else. All power is his; none can resist him, none can act without him. He sets bounds to the raging of the sea, to the fury of princes, to the madness of the people. Thou art safe in his hands, safe in obedience to his will. But thou canst never escape him, never fly from him, never defend thyself against him, for thou livest in him.

5. This also proves that God must see and know all our actions, for we live and move in him. He is always present with us, privy to our most secret thoughts and counsels, observes all our wanderings, sees us in all our retirements. "There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves." This the Scripture in express words teaches, and the reason of the thing speaks it. For if we cannot think, nor move, nor subsist

without God, he must be always intimately present with us, which should possess us with a constant awe and reverence of his pure and all-seeing eye.

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING GOD'S GOVERNING PROVIDENCE.

NEXT to Preservation, as that signifies God's upholding all things in being, and preserving and actuating their natural powers, we must consider God's government of the world. For God is the supreme and sovereign Lord of the world, "who doeth whatsoever pleaseth him both in heaven and in earth;" and therefore the absolute government of all things must be in his hands, or else something might be done which he would not have done.

This all men grant in general words who own a Providence; but when they come to particulars, there are so many excepted cases which they will hardly allow God to have any thing to do in, that they seem to mean little more by God's government than a general inspection of human affairs, his looking on to see the world govern itself; for three parts of four of all that is done in the world they resolve into bare permission, as distinguished from an ordering and disposing Providence; and then it can signify no more than that God does not hinder it. And if this be all, God governs the world in such cases no more than men do. The only difference is, that God can hinder when he don't; but men don't hinder because they can't; but still not to hinder does not signify to govern.

But rightly to understand this matter, the best way is to consider how the Scripture represents it; and because there are great variety of acts in the government of the world of a very different consideration, I shall distinctly inquire into God's government of causes, and his government of events.

I. God's government of causes. And we must consider three sorts of causes, and what the Scripture attributes to

God with respect to each. 1. Natural causes. 2. Accidental causes, or what we call chance, and accident, and fortune. 3. Moral causes and free agents, or the government of mankind.

1. Natural causes, or God's government of the natural world, of the heavens, and earth, and seas, and air, and all things in them which move and act by a necessity of nature, not by chance. Now the Scripture does not only attribute to God all the virtues and powers of nature which belong to creation, and to a preserving Providence, but the direction and government of all their natural influences to do what God has a mind should be done. God does in some measure govern the moral by the natural world. He rewards or punishes men by a wholesome or pestilential air, by fruitful or barren seasons. He hinders or promotes their designs by winds and weather, by a forward or a backward spring, and makes nature give laws to men, and sets bounds to their passions and intrigues. To overthrow the most powerful fleets and armies. To defeat the wisest counsels, and to arbitrate the differences of princes, and the fate of men and kingdoms. And if God govern men by nature, he must govern nature too, for necessary causes cannot be fitted to the government of free agents without the direction and management of a Divine Providence, which guides, exerts, or suspends the influences of nature with as great freedom as men act. Men do not always deserve well or ill; and if the kind or malign influences of nature must be tempered to men's deserts, to punish them when they do ill, and to reward them when they do well, natural causes, which of themselves act necessarily without wisdom or counsel, must be guided by a wise hand.

Thus reason tells us it must be if God govern the world, and God challenges to himself this absolute and sovereign empire over nature. God has bestowed different virtues and powers on natural causes, and in ordinary cases makes use of the powers of nature, and neither acts without them nor against the laws of nature, which makes some unthinking men resolve all into nature without a God or a Providence. Because excepting the case of miracles, which they are not willing to believe, they see every thing else done

by the powers of nature. And if it were not so, God had made a world and made nature to no purpose to do every thing himself by an immediate power, without making use of the powers of nature. But the ordinary government of nature does not signify to act without it or to overrule its powers, but to steer and guide its motions to serve the wise ends of his Providence in the government of mankind.

For as God does not usually act without nature, nor against its laws, so neither does nature act by steady and uniform motions without the direction of God. But while every thing in the material world acts necessarily and exerts its natural powers, God can temper, suspend, direct its influences without reversing the laws of nature. As, for instance, fire and water, wind and rain, thunder and lightning, have their natural virtues and powers, and natural causes, and God produces such effects as they are made to produce by their natural powers. He warms us with fire—invigorates the earth by the benign influences of the sun and moon, and other stars and planets; refreshes and moistens it with springs and fountains and rain from heaven—fans the air with winds, and purges it with thunders and lightnings and the like. But then when and where the rains shall fall and the winds shall blow, and in what measure and proportion, times and seasons, natural causes shall give or withhold their influences, this God keeps in his own power, and can govern without altering the standing laws of nature; and this is his government of natural causes in order to reward or punish men as they shall deserve. Thus God reasons with Job concerning his power and Providence: Job xxxviii. 31—35: "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof on the earth? canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee? canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, here we are?" This is above human power, but belongs to the government and Providence of God. "Fire and hail, snow and vapour, and stormy winds fulfil his word;" Ps. cxlviii. 8. Some-

times God restrains the influences of nature, "shuts up heaven that it shall not rain:" 2 Chron. vii. 13. And at other times he "calls to the clouds that abundance of water may cover the earth." "He gives the former and the latter rain in its season, and reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest:" Jer. v. 24, as he promised to Israel, Deut. xi. 14, 15: "I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy field for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full." He prescribes in what proportions it shall rain; Joel ii. 23, 24: "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month." Nay, God appoints on what place it shall rain, Ezek. xxxiv. 26: "And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season, there shall be showers of blessing." Amos iv. 7, 8: "And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied."

It is impossible to give any tolerable account of such texts as these, without confessing that God keeps the direction and government of natural causes in his own hands. For particular effects, and all the changes of nature can never be attributed to God unless the divine wisdom and counsel determines natural causes to the producing such particular effects. Great part of the happiness or miseries of this life is owing to the good or bad influences of natural causes. That if God take care of mankind he must govern nature; and when he promises health and plenty, or threatens pestilence and famine, how can he make good either if he have not reserved to himself a sovereign power over nature?

The sum is this, that all natural causes are under the immediate and absolute government of Providence—that God

keeps the springs of nature in his own hands, and turns them as he pleases. For mere matter, though it be endowed with all the natural virtues and powers which necessarily produce their natural effects, yet it having no wisdom and counsel of its own, cannot serve the ends of a free agent without being guided by a wise hand. And we see in a thousand instances what an empire human art has over nature, not by changing the nature of things which human art can never do, but by such a skilful application of causes as will produce such effects as unguided, and, if I may so speak, untaught nature could never have produced. And if God have subjected nature to human art, surely he has not exempted it from his own guidance and power.

This shows how necessary it is that God, by an immediate providence, should govern nature. For natural causes are excellent instruments, but to make them useful they must be directed by a skilful hand. And those various changes which are in nature, especially in this sublunary world, (which we are most acquainted with,) without any certain and periodical returns, prove that it is not all mechanism; for mechanical motions are fixed and certain, and either always the same or regular and uniform in their changes.

It is of great use to us to understand this, which teaches us what we may expect from God, and what we must attribute to him in the government of nature. We must not expect in ordinary cases that God should reverse the laws of nature for us. That if we leap into the fire it shall not burn us—or into the water it shall not drown us. And by the same reason the providence of God is not concerned to preserve us when we destroy ourselves by intemperance and lust; for God does not work miracles to deliver men from the evil effects of their own wickedness and folly. But all the kind influences of heaven which supply our wants, and fill our hearts with food and gladness, are owing to that good Providence which commands nature to yield her increase; and those disorders of nature which afflict the world with famines, and pestilence and earthquakes, are the effects of God's anger and displeasure, and are ordered by him for the punishment of a wicked world. We must all believe this, or confess that we mock God when we bless him for a

healthful air and fruitful seasons, or deprecate his anger when we see the visible tokens of his vengeance in the disorders of nature. For did not God immediately interpose in the government of nature, there would be no reason to beg his favour, or to deprecate his anger upon these accounts.

2. Let us consider God's government of accidental causes, or what we call chance and accident, which has a large empire over human affairs. Not that chance and accident can do any thing properly speaking, (for whatever is done has some proper and natural cause which does it;) but what we call accidental causes, is rather such an accidental concurrence of different causes, as produces unexpected and undesigned effects; as when one man, by accident, loses a purse of gold, and another man walking in the fields, without any such expectation, by as great an accident finds it. And how much of the good or evil that happens to us in this world is owing to such undesigned, surprising, accidental events, every man must know who has made any observations on his own or other men's lives and fortunes. The wise man observed this long since, Eccl. ix. 11: "I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all." Some unusual and casual events change the fortunes of men, and disappoint the most proper and natural means of success. What should conquer in a race but swiftness? or win the battle but strength? What should supply men's wants and increase riches, but wisdom and understanding in human affairs? What more likely way to gain the favour of princes and people, than a dexterous and skilful application and address? And yet the preacher observed, in his days, and the observation holds good still, that it is not always thus: *time* and *chance*, some favourable junctures, and unseen accidents, are more powerful than all human strength, or art, or skill.

Now what an ill state were mankind in, did not a wise and merciful hand govern what we call chance and fortune? How can God govern the world, or dispose of men's lives

and fortunes, without governing chance, all unseen, unknown and surprising events, which disappoint the counsels of the wise, and in a moment unavoidably change the whole scene of human affairs? Upon what little unexpected things do the fortunes of men, of families, of whole kingdoms turn? And unless these little unexpected things are governed by God, some of the greatest changes in the world are exempted from his care and providence.

This is reason enough to believe that if God governs the world, he governs chance and fortune; that the most unexpected events, how casual soever they appear to us, are foreseen and ordered by God.

Such events as these are the properest objects of God's care and government, because they are very great instruments of Providence. Many times the greatest things are done by them, and they are the most visible demonstration of a superior wisdom and power which governs the world. By these means, God disappoints the wisdom of the wise, and defeats the power of the mighty; "frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish:" Isa. xliv. 25. Did strength and wisdom always prevail, as in a great measure they would, were it not for such unseen disappointments, mankind would take less notice of Providence, and would have less reason to do it, since they would be the more absolute masters of their own fortunes. A powerful combination of sinners, managed by some crafty politicians, would govern the world; but the uncertain turnings and changes of fortune keep mankind in awe, make the most prosperous and powerful sinners fear an unseen vengeance, and give security to good men against unseen evils, which cannot befal them without the order and appointment of God.

That there are a great many accidental and casual events which happen to us all, and which are of great consequence to the happiness or miseries of our lives, all men see and feel. That we cannot defend ourselves from such unseen events, which we know nothing of till we feel them, is as manifest as that there are such events; and what so properly belongs to the divine care, as that which we ourselves

can take no care of? The heathens made fortune a goddess, and attributed the government of all things to her τυχὴ κυβερνᾶ πάντα. Whereby they only signified the government of Providence in all casual and fortuitous events; and if Providence govern any thing, it must govern chance, which governs almost all things else, and which none but God can govern. As far as human prudence and foresight reach, God expects we should take care of ourselves; and if we will not, he suffers us to reap the fruits of our own folly: but when we cannot take care of ourselves, we have reason to expect and hope, that God will take care of us. In other cases human prudence and industry must concur with the divine Providence: in matters of chance and accident, Providence must act alone and do all itself, for we know nothing of it; so that all the arguments for Providence do most strongly conclude for God's government of all casual events.

And the Scripture does as expressly attribute all such events to God, as any other acts of Providence and government. In the law of Moses, when a man killed his neighbour by accident, God is said to deliver him into his hands. Exod. xxi. 12, 13: "He that smiteth a man so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand, then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee:" where "God's delivering him into his hands," is opposed to him "that smiteth a man so that he die," and "to him that comes presumptuously upon his neighbour to slay him," (14th verse,) and therefore signifies one who kills his neighbour by mere accident, as it is explained in Deut. xix. 4, 5: "And this is the case of the slayer that shall flee thither," i. e. to the city of refuge. "Whoso killeth his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past,—as when a man goeth into the wood with his neighbour to hew wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slippeth from the helve, and lighteth upon his neighbour that he die,—he shall flee unto one of the cities and live." What can be more accidental than this? And yet we are assured that this is appointed by the divine Providence; that God

delivers the man who is killed, into the hands of him that killed him.

Is any thing more casual than a lot? And yet Solomon tells us, "the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord," (Prov. xvi. 33;) which is not confined to the case of lots, but to signify to us that nothing is so casual and uncertain, as to be exempted from the disposal of Providence. For what seems accidental to us, is not chance, but Providence,—is ordered and appointed by God to bring to pass what his own wisdom and counsel has decreed; as is very evident from some remarkable instances of Providence which are recorded in Scripture.

By how many seeming accidents and casual events was Joseph advanced to Pharaoh's throne? His dreams, whereby God foretold his advancement, made his brethren envious at him, and watch some convenient opportunity to get rid of him, and so confute his dreams. Jacob sends Joseph to visit his brethren in the fields, where they were keeping their sheep. This gave them an opportunity to execute their revenge, and at first they intended to murder him; but the Ishmaelites accidentally passing by, they sold Joseph to them, and they carried him into Egypt and sold him to Potiphar. Potiphar's wife tempts him to uncleanness, and being denied by Joseph, she accuses him to his lord, who cast him into the king's prison. Whilst he was there, the king's butler and baker were cast into the same prison, and dreamed their several dreams, which Joseph expounded to them, and the event verified his interpretation. The butler, who was restored to his office, forgat Joseph, till two years after, when Pharaoh dreamed a dream which none of the wise men could interpret, and then Joseph was sent for, and advanced to the highest place of dignity and power next to Pharaoh. The years of famine brought Joseph's brethren into Egypt to buy corn, where they bowed before him, according to his dream. This occasioned the removal of Jacob and his whole family into Egypt, where Joseph placed them in the land of Goshen, by which means God fulfilled what he had told Abraham: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hun-

dred years:" Gen. xv. 13. How casual does all this appear to us! But no man will think that prophecies are fulfilled by chance; and therefore we must confess, that what seems chance to us, was appointed by God.

Thus God intended to deliver Israel out of Egypt by the hands of Moses. Moses was born at a time when the king of Egypt had commanded that every son that was born to the Israelites should be cast into the river. His mother hid him three months, and not being able to conceal him any longer, exposed him in an ark of bulrushes among the flags by the river side. Pharaoh's daughter came down to wash herself in the river, and finds the ark with the child in it—puts him to his own mother to nurse, whereby he came to know his own kindred and relations, and to be instructed in the knowledge and worship of the God of Israel. Afterwards Pharaoh's daughter takes him home and breeds him up as her own son, whereby he was instructed in all the learning of Egypt, and in all the policies of Pharaoh's court, which qualified him for government. When he was forty years old, he had lived long enough in Pharaoh's court, and God thought fit to remove him into better company, and to accustom him to a more severe life; and this was done by as strange an accident. He slew an Egyptian in defence of an oppressed Jew, and was betrayed by his own brethren, and was forced to fly from Pharaoh to save his own life, till the time was come for the deliverance of Israel, and then God sent him back into Egypt to bring his people out from thence with signs and wonders and a mighty hand.

Thus God had foretold Ahab by the prophet Micaiah, that if he went up against Ramoth-Gilead, he should perish there, and this was accomplished by a very great chance. For "a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king between the joints of the harness," of which he died: 1 Kings xxii. 34. The blood which came from his wound ran into the chariot, and "one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood;" which was a very casual thing, and little thought of by him who did it, and yet fulfilled God's threatening against Ahab; "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine: ch. xxi. v. 19.

I shall add but one example more of this nature, and it is a very remarkable one: God's deliverance of the Jews in the days of Esther, from the wicked conspiracy of Haman. This Haman being advanced to great power and authority by king Ahasuerus, took great offence at Mordecai the Jew, who refused to reverence him as others did; and for his sake obtained a decree from the king to destroy all the Jews in the provinces of his dominions. Mordecai sends to queen Esther to go to the king, and to petition him about this matter. This was a very hazardous attempt, it being death by the law for any person, man or woman, to go to the king without being called, unless the king held out his golden sceptre to them. But the queen at last, after three days, fasting, ventured her own life to save her people, and obtained favour in the king's sight, who held out the golden sceptre to her. All she requested at that time was, that the king and Haman would come to the banquet which she had prepared. And being then asked what her petition was, with an assurance that it should be granted, she begged that the king and Haman would come the next day also to her banquet, and then she would declare it. Haman was much exalted with the king's favour, and that queen Esther had admitted none to banquet with the king but himself. But still Mordecai, who refused to bow before him, was a great grievance; and by the advice of his friends he built a gallows fifty cubits high, and resolved that night to beg of the king that Mordecai might be hanged on it, and had he come in time his petition had been certainly granted. But it so happened that that very night the king could not sleep, and he called for the book of the records of the chronicles, and there they found written that Mordecai had discovered the treason of two of the king's chamberlains against him; and finding, upon inquiry, that he had never been rewarded for it, he resolved to do him honour, and made Haman, who was at the door to beg that Mordecai might be hanged, his minister in doing him honour. This prepared the king to grant queen Esther's request, and hanged Haman upon the gallows he had built for Mordecai, and preserved the Jews from that destruction he had designed against them. And thus it is almost in all the remarkable passages of Provi-

dence. There is so much appearance of chance and accident which has the greatest stroke in some wonderful events, as may satisfy considering men that the world is governed by a Divine wisdom and counsel, and an invisible power, and that the immediate and visible causes have always the least hand in it.

For can we think otherwise when we see as many visible marks of wisdom, and goodness, and justice, in what we call chance as in any other acts of Providence. Nay, when the wisdom of Providence is principally seen in the government of fortuitous events—when we see a world wisely made, though we did not see it made, yet we conclude that it was not made by chance, but by a wise being. And by the same reason, when we see accidental events, nay, a long incoherent series of accidents concur to the producing the most admirable effects, we ought to conclude that there is a wise invisible hand which governs chance, which of itself can do nothing wisely. When the lives and fortunes of men, the fate of kingdoms and empires, the successes of war, the changes of government, are so often determined and brought about by the most visible accidents—when chance defeats the wisest counsels and the greatest power—when good men are rewarded and the church of God preserved by appearing chances—when bad men are punished by chance, and the very chance whereby they are punished carries the marks of their sins upon it, for which they are punished—I say, can any man in such cases think that all this is mere chance? When how accidental soever the means are, or appear to be, whereby such things are done, there is no appearance at all of chance in the event. But the changes and revolutions, the rewards and punishments of chance, are all as wisely done as if there had been nothing of chance and accident in it. This is the great security of our lives, amidst all the uncertainties of fortune, that chance itself cannot hurt us without a divine commission. This is a sure foundation of faith, and hope, and trust in God, how calamitous and desperate soever our external condition seems to be, that God never wants means to help—that he has a thousand unseen ways, a whole army of accidents and unexpected events at command to disappoint such designs,

which no visible art or power can disappoint, and to save those whom no visible power can save.

This is an undeniable reason for a perpetual awe and reverence of God, and an entire submission to him, and a devout acknowledgment of him in all our ways, that we have no security but in his Providence and protection. For whatever provision we can make against foreseen and foreknown evils, we can never provide against chance. That is wholly in God's hands, and no human wit or strength can withstand it; which may abate the pride and self-confidence of men, and teach the rich, and great, and mighty, a religious veneration of God, who can with so much ease "pull down the mighty from their seat, and advance those of low degree."

3. The next thing to be explained is God's government of moral causes or free agents, that is, the government of men considered as the instruments of Providence, which God makes use of for the accomplishment of his own wise counsels.

Most of the good or evil which happens to us in this world is done by men. If God reward, or if he punish us, usually men are his ministers in both, to execute his vengeance, or to dispense his blessings. And therefore God must have as absolute a government over mankind, of all their thoughts, and passions, and counsels, and actions, as he has of the powers and influences of natural causes, or else he cannot reward and punish when and as he pleases. If men could hurt those whom God would bless and reward, or do good to those whom God would punish, both good and bad men might be happy or miserable in this world, whether God would or not. Our fortunes would depend upon the numbers and power of our friends or enemies, upon the good or bad humours and inclinations of those among whom we live, and Providence could not help us.

Now this is the great difficulty, how God can exercise such an absolute government over mankind, who are free agents, without destroying the liberty and freedom of their choice, which would destroy the nature of virtue and vice, of rewards and punishments. The necessity of allowing this, if we will acknowledge a Providence, and the plain

testimonies and examples of this absolute and uncontrollable government which we find in Scripture, have made some men deny the liberty of human actions, and represent mankind to be as mere machines as a watch or a clock, which move as they are moved. And then they know not how to bring religion and the moral differences of good and evil, and the natural justice of rewards and punishments into their scheme; for nothing of all this can be reconciled with absolute necessity and fate. Others, to avoid these difficulties, are afraid of attributing too much to Providence, or have such confused and perplexed notions about it, that there are few cases wherein they can securely depend on God.

But I think this difficulty will be easily removed if we distinguish between God's government of men, as reasonable creatures and free agents, and his government of them as the instruments of Providence. The first consider them in their own private and natural capacity, the second in relation to the rest of mankind, which makes a great difference in the reason and in the acts of government.

Man, considered in his nature, is a reasonable creature and free agent; and therefore the proper government of man consists in giving him laws, that he may know the difference between good and evil, what he ought to choose and what to refuse, and in annexing such rewards and punishments to the observation or to the breach of these laws, as may reasonably invite him to obedience, and deter him from sin; and as this degenerate state requires, in laying such external restraints on him, and affording him such internal assistances of grace, as the divine wisdom sees proportioned to the weakness and corruption of human nature: and when this is done, it behooves God to leave him to his own choice, and to reward or punish him as he deserves; for a forced virtue deserves no reward, and a necessity of sinning will reasonably excuse from punishment. The nature of a reasonable creature, of virtue and vice, of rewards and punishments, represent it as very becoming the wisdom and justice of God, to leave every man to the freedom of his own choice, to do good or evil, to deserve rewards or punishments, as far as he himself is only concerned in it.

But when we consider man in society, the case is altered;

for when the good or evil of their actions extends beyond themselves, to do good or hurt to other men, the Providence of God becomes concerned either to hinder, or to permit and order it, as may best serve the wise ends of government, as those other men who are like to be the better or the worse for it, have deserved well or ill of God. Though God has made man a free agent, yet we must not think that he has made such a creature as he himself cannot govern. No man doubts, but that God can, when he pleases, by an irresistible power, turn men's hearts, and chain up their passions, and alter their counsels. The only question is, When it is fit for God to do this; and no man can question the fitness of it, when the good government of the world requires it. God makes no man good or bad, virtuous or vicious, by a perpetual and irresistible force; for this contradicts the nature of virtue and vice, which requires a freedom and liberty of choice; but God may, by a secret and irresistible influence upon men's minds, even force them to do that good which they have no inclination to do, and restrain them from doing that evil which otherwise they would have done, which does not make them good men, but makes them the instruments of Providence in doing good to men; and God, who is the sovereign Lord of all creatures, may, when he sees fit, press those men, if I may so speak, to his service, who would not do good upon choice. This shows the difference between the government of grace, and Providence: the first has relation to virtue and vice, to make men good, to change their natures and sinful inclinations into habits of virtue, and therefore admits of no greater force than what is consistent with the freedom of choice, and the nature of virtue and vice; but the government of Providence respects the external happiness or misery, rewards or punishments of men or nations; and to this purpose God may use what instruments he pleases, and exercise such authority over nature or over men as is necessary to accomplish his own wise counsels of mercy or judgment. And it was necessary to premise this distinction, because the confounding these two has occasioned great difficulties and mistakes both in the doctrine of grace and providence.

Let us then now more particularly consider how God go-

verns mankind, so as to make them the instruments and ministers of his providence in the world. The methods of the divine wisdom are infinite and unsearchable, and we must not expect fully to comprehend all the secrets and mysteries of God's government; but something we may know of this, enough to teach us to reverence God, and to trust in him, and to vindicate his providence from the cavils of ignorance and infidelity, which is as much as is useful for us to know. And I shall reduce what I have to say to two general heads: 1. The government of men's minds, of their wills, their passions, and counsels: 2. The government of their actions.

1. God's government of the minds of men, their wills, and passions, and counsels; for these are the great springs of action, and as free a principle as the mind of man is, it is not ungovernable; it may be governed, and that without an omnipotent power, against its own bias, and without changing its inclinations; and what may be done, certainly God can do; and when it is necessary to the ends of Providence, we may conclude he will do it. Let a man be never so much bent upon any project, yet hope or fear, some present great advantage or great inconvenience, the powerful intercession of friends, a sudden change of circumstances, the improbability of success, the irreparable mischief of a defeat, and a thousand other considerations, will divert him from it; and how easy is it for God to imprint such thoughts upon men's minds with an irresistible vigour and brightness, that it shall be no more in their power to do what they had a mind to, than to resist all the charms of riches and honours, than to leap into the fire, and to choose misery and ruin.

That thus it is, the Scripture assures us: (Prov. xxi. 1.) "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will." And if the king's heart be in the hand of the Lord, we cannot doubt but he hath all other men's hearts in his hand also, and can turn and change them as he pleases. Thus, the wise man tells us, "A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps:" Prov. xvi. 9. Men consult and advise what to do, but after all, God steers and directs them

which way he pleases; for though "there are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand," (Prov. xix. 21,) which made the wise man conclude, "Man's goings are of the Lord: how can a man then understand his own way?" Prov. xx. 24. That is, God has such an absolute government of the hearts and actions of men, when his providence is concerned in the event, that no man can certainly know what he himself shall choose and do; for God can, in an instant, alter his mind, and make him steer a very different course from what he intended. As the prophet Jeremiah assures us, "I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps:" Jer. x. 23. And Solomon tells us something more strange than this: "The preparation of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord;" (Prov. xvi. 1;) or as the Hebrew seems to signify, "the preparation of the heart is from man;" a man premeditates and resolves what he will say; but notwithstanding that, "the answer of the tongue is of the Lord." When he comes to speak, he shall say nothing but what God pleases. Which sayings must not be expounded to a universal sense, that it is always thus; but that thus it is, whenever God sees fit to interpose, which he does as often as he has any wise end to serve by it.

Thus we are told, that "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him:" Prov. xvi. 7. And it is a very remarkable promise God makes to the children of Israel, that when all their males should come three times every year to worship God at Jerusalem, by which means their country was left without defence, exposed to the rapine of their enemies who dwelt round about them, that "no man should desire their land, when they go up to appear before the Lord:" Exod. xxxiv. 24. We have many examples of this in Scripture, and some of those many ways whereby God does it. When Abraham sojourned in Gerar, he said of Sarah, his wife, that she was his sister, and Abimelech, the king of Gerar, sent and took her; but God reproved Abimelech in a dream, and tells him that he had withheld him from sinning, and not suffered him to touch her: Gen. xx. 1, &c. Thus,

when Jacob fled from Laban with his wives and children, and Laban pursued him, God appeared to Laban in a dream, and commanded him that he should not speak to Jacob either good or hurt: Gen. xxxi. 24. Such appearances were very common in that age, though they seem very extraordinary to us; but God does the same thing still by strong and lively impressions upon our minds—by suggesting and fixing such thoughts in us, as excite or calm our passions, as encourage us to bold and great attempts, or check us in our career by frightful imaginations and unaccountable fears and terrors, or by such other arguments as are apt to change our purposes and counsels.

Sometimes God does this by a concurrence of external causes, which at other times would not have been effectual, but shall certainly have their effect when God enforces the impression.

Thus God in one moment turned the heart of Esau when he came out in a great rage against his brother Jacob. It was an old hatred he had conceived against him for the loss of his birthright and of his blessing. And he had for many years confirmed himself in a resolution to cut him off the first opportunity he had to do it. And could it be expected that the present which Jacob sent him, which he could have taken if he had pleased without receiving it as a gift, and that the submission of Jacob when he was in his power, should all on a sudden make him forget all that was past, and the very business he came for, and turn his bloody designs into the kindest embraces? No! this was God's work, the effect of that blessing which the angel gave to Jacob after a whole night's wrestling with him in Penuel: Gen. xxxii. xxxiii. And when God pleases, the weakest means shall change the most sullen and obstinate resolutions.

Of the same nature of this is the story of David and Abigail. Nabal had highly provoked David by the churlish answer which he sent him, and David was resolved to take a very severe revenge on Nabal and his house. But God sent Abigail to pacify him, who, by her presence and dutiful and submissive behaviour and wise counsels, diverted him from those bloody resolutions he had taken, as David himself acknowledges: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

who sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, who hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand:" 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

Saul pursued David in the wilderness to take away his life, and God delivered him twice into David's hands; and the kindness David showed him in not killing him when he was in his power, did at last turn the heart of Saul, that he pursued him no more: 1 Sam. xxvi. xxvii.

Thus God confounded the good counsel of Ahithophel by the advice of Hushai, which Absalom chose to follow. And the text tells us this was from God, who had purposed "to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that he might bring evil upon Absalom:" 2 Sam. xvii. 14. Such an absolute empire has God over the minds of men that he can turn them as he pleases, can lead them into new thoughts and counsels, with as great ease as the waters of a river may be drawn into a new channel prepared for them.

2. When God does not think fit to change and alter men's wills and passions, he can govern their actions and serve the ends of his providence by them. When God suffers them to pursue their own counsels and to do what they themselves like best—he does that by their hands which they little expected or intended. The same action may serve very different ends; and therefore God and men have very different intentions in it. And what is ill done by men, and for a very ill end, may be ordered by God for wise and good purposes; nay, the ill ends which men designed may be disappointed, and the good which God intended by it have its effect. And this is as absolute a government over men's actions as the ends of providence require, when whatever men do, if they intend one thing and God another, *the counsel of God shall stand*, and what they intended shall have no effect any further than as it is subservient to the divine counsels: as to give some plain examples of it.

Joseph's brethren being offended at his dreams and at the peculiar kindness which their father Jacob showed him, resolved to get rid of him; but God intended to send him

into Egypt, to advance him to Pharaoh's throne, and to transplant Jacob and his family thither. And therefore God would not suffer them to slay him as they first intended, but he suffered them to sell him to the Ishmaelites, who carried him into Egypt, which disappointed what they aimed at in it, never to see or hear more of him, but accomplished the decrees and counsels of God.

Another example we have in the king of Assyria, who came against Jerusalem with a powerful army, with an intention to destroy it, but God intended no more than to correct them for their sins. This God suffered him to do, but he could do no more. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation: I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil and to take the prey, and to tread them down like mire in the street." Thus far God gave him a commission; that is, thus far God intended to suffer his rage and pride to proceed. But this was the least of his intention: "Howbeit he thinketh not so, but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations, not a few." But in this God disappointed him. "Wherefore, it shall come to pass that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his proud looks:" Isa. x. 5—7, 12.

A great many examples might be given of this nature, but these are sufficient to show what different intentions God and men have in the same actions, and how easily God can defeat what men intend, and accomplish by them his own wise counsels, which they never thought of. When God has no particular ends of Providence to serve by the lusts, and passions, and evil designs of men, he commonly disappoints them; that when "they intend evil, and imagine a mischievous device, they are not able to perform it:" Ps. xxi. 11. Or he turns the evil upon their own heads: "the heathen are sunk down into the pit that they made, in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth. The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands: Ps. ix. 15, 16.

Or he doubly disappoints their malice, not only by defeating the evil they intended, but by turning it to the great advantage of those it was intended against; which was visible in the case of Haman, whose malice against Mordecai, and all the Jews for his sake, did not only prove his own ruin, but the great advancement of Mordecai, and the glory and triumph of the Jewish nation.

Having thus briefly shown what government God has both of the heart and the actions of men, how easily he can alter their counsels and manage their passions, make them do what good they never intended, and disappoint the evil which they did intend, or turn it into good; this is a sufficient demonstration, how absolute the divine Providence is. For he who has such an absolute government of nature, of what we call chance and fortune, and of the wills and actions of men, can do whatsoever pleaseth him. But that we may have the clearer and more distinct apprehension of God's government of mankind, to make them the instruments of his providence, I shall more particularly but very briefly state this matter, both with respect to good and to bad men.

1. As for good men, there is no difficulty in their case; for they are the ministers of a good and beneficent Providence. They do good out of temper and inclination, and a habit and principle of virtue, and out of reverence to the divine laws, and are ready to obey every extraordinary impression to excite and determine them to such particular good offices as God thinks fit to employ them in. And this is nothing but what is very honourable for God, and what becomes good men; for to do good is the glory of human nature, as well as of the divine Providence. And good men will observe the laws of virtue in doing good; and while good is done by honest and virtuous means, there can be no objection against Providence.

2. But as bad men are most difficultly governed, so the greatest difficulty is in vindicating Providence in making use of the ministries of bad men. For it is commonly thought a great blemish to Providence when glorious and admirable designs are brought to pass by the sins of men. Now the foundation of this objection is a great mistake, as if God

could not serve his own providence by the sins of men without being the cause of men's sins. For there is no colour nor reasonable pretence of an objection against God's making the sins of men serve wise and good ends, if he can do this without having any hand in men's sins.

It is the great glory of Providence to bring good out of evil, and while all the events of providence are just, and righteous, and holy, and wise, and such as become a God, it is much more admirable to consider that all this should be, while there is so much wickedness and disorder in the world.

The true state of this matter in short is this; God never suggests any evil designs to men. That is owing to their own wicked hearts, or to the temptations of other wicked men, or of wicked spirits. But when men have formed any wicked designs, he sometimes, as you have heard, changes their purposes, or deters them from putting them in execution. And when he suffers them to proceed to action, he either shamefully disappoints them, or serves some wise and good end by what they wickedly do. And if Providence consists in the care and government of mankind, how can God govern mankind better than to permit bad men to do no more hurt than what he can turn to good. God does not govern the world by an immediate and miraculous power, but governs men by men, and makes them help and defend, reward and punish one another. And therefore there is no other ordinary way of punishing bad men, (excepting the civil sword which reaches but a few criminals,) but to punish them by the wickedness of other bad men. And what can more become the wisdom and justice of Providence than to make bad men the ministers and executioners of a divine vengeance upon each other, which is one great end God serves by the sins of men. I am sure that it is for the great good of the world that God has the government of bad men, that they cannot do so much hurt as they would, and the mischief God permits them to do is directed to fall on such persons as either want correction, or deserve punishment. For this is another thing very observable in God's government both of the good and bad actions of men—that as in the government of natural causes

God directs where, and when, and in what proportion nature shall exert its influences. That it shall rain upon one city and not upon another. So God does not only excite men to do good, but directs and determines them where to do it—chooses out such persons as they shall do good to, and appoints what good they shall do, and in what measures and proportions they shall do it. And he not only sets bounds to the lusts and passions of bad men, but when he sees fit to permit their wickedness, he directs where the hurt and mischief of it shall light. We need no other proof of this but the very notion of providence, which is, God's care of his creatures. For that requires a particular application of the good or evil which men do to such particular persons as God thinks fit to do good to, or to afflict and punish, which is the most material and most necessary exercise of the wisdom and justice and goodness of Providence. For if God suffered men to do good or evil at random, without directing them to fit and proper objects, the fortunes of particular men would depend upon as great a chance as the mutable lusts and passions and fancies of men.

The only use I shall make of this at present is to convince you how perfectly we are in God's hands, and how secure we are in his protection—what little reason we have to be afraid of men whatever their power, how furious soever their passions are—how vain it is to trust in men and to depend on their favour, for they can neither do good nor hurt but as they are directed by God, and therefore he alone must be the supreme object of our fear and trust. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" If we make him our enemy, who can save us out of his hands? So that we have but one thing to take care of, and we are safe: let us make God our friend, and he will raise us up friends, and patrons, and protectors—will deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, or make our enemies to be at peace with us.

II. Having thus explained God's government of causes, let us now consider his government of events. And I think it will be easily granted me that if all those causes by which all events are brought to pass are governed by God, God must also have the absolute government of all events in his own hands.

But the government of causes and events are of a very different consideration, and to represent this as plainly and familiarly as I can, I shall show you, 1. What I mean by events, when I attribute the government of all events to God. 2. Wherein God's government of events consists. 3. The difference between God's absolute government of all events, and necessity and fate. 4. That the exercise of a particular providence consists in the government of all events.

1. What I mean by events. Now every thing that is done may in a large sense be called an event, and is in some degree or other under the government of Providence as all the actions of men are. But when I speak of God's government of events, I mean only such events as are in Scripture called God's *doings*, as being ordered and appointed by him; that is to say, all the good or evil which happens to private men, or to kingdoms and nations in this world. Every thing that is done is not God's doing, for there is a great deal of evil every day committed which God does not order and appoint to be done, but has expressly forbid the doing of it. But there is no good or evil which happens to any men, or to any society of men, but what God orders and appoints for them: and this is God's government of all events. This is the proper exercise of Providence, to allot all men their fortunes and conditions in the world, to dispense rewards and punishments, to take care that no man shall receive either good or evil but from the hand and by the appointment of God. This is the subject of all the disputes about the justice and goodness and wisdom of Providence; and all the objections against Providence necessarily suppose that thus it is, or thus it ought to be if God govern the world. For unless Providence be concerned to take care that no men be happy or miserable but as they deserve, which cannot be without the absolute government of all events, the prosperity of bad men and the sufferings of the good, the many miseries that are in the world, and the uncertain changes and turnings of fortune, can be no objection against Providence. And indeed, were not this the case, Providence would be so insignificant a name that it would not be worth the while to dispute for or against it. For a Providence which neither can do us good or hurt, or which

cannot always and in all cases do it, is worth nothing, or worth no more than it can do good or hurt. And therefore all the good or evil which does or can befall men or kingdoms, is in Scripture attributed to Providence, and promised or threatened by God as men shall deserve either. Such as length of days, or a sudden and untimely death, health or sickness, honour or disgrace, riches or poverty, plenty or famine, war or peace, the changing times and seasons, the removing kings and setting up kings; and with respect to such events as these, whatever the immediate causes of them be, God is said to do whatsoever pleaseth him.

2. But we shall better understand this by inquiring into the nature of God's government. Now God's government of events consists in ordering and appointing whatever good or evil shall befall men. For according to the Scripture we must attribute such a government to God as makes all these events *his will and doing;* and nothing can be his will and doing but what he wills and orders.

Some men think it enough to say that God permits every thing that is done, but will by no means allow that God wills, and orders, and appoints it, which they are afraid will charge the divine Providence with all the evil that is done in the world; and truly so it would did God order and appoint the evil to be done. But though God orders and appoints what evils every man shall suffer, he orders and appoints no man to do the evil; he only permits some men to do mischief, and appoints who shall suffer by it, which is the short resolution of this case. To attribute the evils which some men suffer from other men's sins merely to God's permission, is to destroy the government of Providence—for bare permission is not government, and those evils which God permits, but does not order, cannot be called *his will and doing*. And if this be the case of all the evils we suffer from other men's sins, most of the evils which men suffer befall them without God's will and appointment. And yet to attribute all the evil which men do to God's order and appointment, is to destroy the holiness of Providence. And therefore we must necessarily distinguish between the evils men do and the evils they suffer. The first God permits and directs, the second he orders and

appoints. How God governs men's hearts and actions I have already explained, and this is the place to consider God's permission of evil, for permission relates to actions. Men's own wicked hearts conceive and form wicked designs, and they execute them by God's permission, but no man suffers by them but by God's appointment. God's care of his creatures requires that no man should suffer any thing but what God orders for him; and if such sufferings be just and righteous, how wicked soever the causes be, it is no reproach to Providence to order and appoint them. Suppose a man have forfeited his life or estate, or reputation to Providence, or though he have made no criminal forfeiture of it, yet God sees fit for other wise reasons to remove him out of the world or to reduce him to poverty and contempt. Is it any fault in Providence to deliver such a man into the hands of murderers, oppressors, slanderers, who are very forward to execute such decrees when Providence takes off the restraint and sets them at liberty to follow their own lusts? And when there are so many that deserve or need these or such kind of punishments or corrections, and such vast numbers of bad men who are ready every day to commit such outrages, did not God restrain them, is it not very visible how easily God can order and appoint such sufferings for men without ordering or appointing any man's sins? It requires no more than to bring those whom God appoints for suffering into the reach of such men, and to put them into their power, and their own malice and wickedness will do the rest. It is like exposing condemned malefactors to wild beasts, whose nature and inclination is to devour; and if God chains up bad men as we do wild beasts, that they cannot touch any one but whom God delivers up to them, and lets them loose only to execute his own just and righteous judgment, can any thing be more honourable, to Providence, or a greater security to mankind?

To form an idea of this in our minds, let us suppose this to be the case of an earthly prince, that he perfectly understood all the deserts, and all the inclinations of his subjects, and had such an invisible and insensible authority over them, that without giving them any directions, or letting them know any thing of his intentions, or offering any vio-

lence to their own inclinations, he could determine them to do that hurt which they had a mind to do to those, and to those only, whom he intended to punish; and to do the good they are desirous to do, to those, and to those only, whom he intends to reward: in case such a prince took care that no man should suffer more from the wickedness of others, than what he deserved, and the reasons of government required, would any man charge such a prince with all the wickedness that is committed in his kingdom, only because he so wisely orders it, that some bad men shall execute his vengeance upon other bad men, and serve instead of judge and jury, and executioners? Nay, would not every man say that this is the most perfect and absolute form of government in the world? Earthly princes indeed cannot do this, but this is the government of God, who accomplishes his own wise counsels by the ministries of man.

And this may satisfy us in what sense all the good and all the evil that happens either to private men or to kingdoms and nations, is said to be *God's will*, and *God's doing, and what pleaseth him;* because no man or nation is rewarded or punished but by God's order and appointment; that as many good men as there are in the world who are ready to do good to all they can, and as many bad men as there are who are ready to do all the mischief they can, none of them can do either good or hurt to any but to those whom God has appointed for either, which makes God the absolute Lord and Sovereign of the world, since whatever men intend, all men's fortunes and conditions depend upon his will.

And since God absolutely orders and appoints nothing but the event, if the event be holy, just and good, that is, if men be rewarded and punished according to their works, as far as the justice and goodness of Providence is concerned in this world, there can be no reasonable objection against Providence; for by what wicked means soever men be rewarded or punished, if the reward or punishment be holy, just, and good, this vindicates the holiness, and justice, and goodness of Providence: of which, more hereafter. Let men's wickedness be to themselves, for that is their own; but that the wickedness of men is overruled by an

invisible hand to accomplish wise and just decrees, that is the glory of Providence.

And this suggests another evident reason why all the good or evil that befalls men is called *God's will* and *God's doings*, because, in a strict and proper sense, it is not man's will nor man's doings. What is done is either what those who did it never intended to do, or else serves such ends, and is ordered by God for such ends, as those who did it never thought of; which proves men to be only instruments, but God the Supreme Disposer of all events. If we must attribute all things that are done, either to God or men, then what is not done by men, must be done by God; and men cannot be properly said to do what they never intended; and therefore whatever is either beyond or contrary to what man intended, must either be attributed to chance or to a Divine Providence. I observed before, what different intentions God and men have in the same actions—what is intended by men is their doing—what is intended by God, is his doing, and wholly his doing, when what God intended was not intended by men. For this reason Joseph tells his brethren, that it was not they, but God that sent him into Egypt, (Gen. xlv. 4—8,) for they thought nothing of sending him into Egypt; but this was what God intended when he permitted them to sell him to the Ishmaelites: this was their sin, as he adds, (Gen. l. 20,) "But as for you, ye thought evil against me;" but the good that was done was wholly God's doings; *but God meant it unto good.* And thus it is in other cases, which shows us what the Scripture calls God's doings. The punishment of sinners, and those evils he brings on them are God's doings but not the sins whereby they are punished. The punishment of David's adultery by the incest of Absalom was God's doing, but not Absalom's incest. The sending Joseph into Egypt, and advancing him into Pharaoh's throne, were God's doings; but not the sin of his brethren in selling him for a slave. And thus it is throughout the Scripture: nothing is called God's will or God's doing which has any moral evil in it: all wicked actions are men's own will and own doings, which God permits for wise ends, but never orders or appoints; but

the good or evil which is done by men's sins, that is God's doing. And I hope by this time you all know how to distinguish between God's government of men's actions, and his government of events; and then we may safely attribute all events to God's order and appointment, without danger of charging God with the sins of men, whereby such events are brought to pass.

3. Let us now consider what difference there is between God's absolute government of all events, and necessity and fate; for many men are very apt to confound these two. If no good or evil befall any man, but what God orders and appoints for them, this they think sounds like fate and destiny —that every man's fortune is written upon his forehead—and that it is impossible for any man, by all his care, and industry, and prudence, to make his condition better than what God has decreed it to be in the irreversible rolls of fate. And yet an unrelenting, immutable fate is so irreconcilable with the liberty of human actions, with the nature of good and evil, of rewards and punishments, that if we admit of it, there is an end of all religion, of all virtuous endeavours, of all great and generous attempts: it is to no purpose to pray to God, or to trust in him, or to resist temptations, or to be diligent in our business, or prudent and circumspect in our actions; for what will be, will be: or if any means be to be used, that is no matter of our choice or care; but we shall do it as necessarily and mechanically as a watch moves and points to the hour of the day; for fate has, by the same necessity, determined the means and the end, and we can do no more nor less than fate has determined.

I shall not now trouble you with an account of the various opinions of the ancient philosophers about fate, none of whom ever dreamed of such a terrible fate as some Christians have fancied, which reaches not only to this world, but to all eternity. What I have already discoursed is sufficient to vindicate the doctrine of Providence from the least imputation of necessity and fate.

For, (1.) though God overrules the actions of men, to do what he himself thinks fit to be done, yet he lays no necessity upon human actions: men will and choose freely, pursue their own interests and inclinations, just as they

would do as if there were no Providence to govern them; and while men act freely, it is certain there can be no absolute fate. God, indeed, as you have already heard, sometimes hinders them from executing their wicked purposes, and permits them to do no more hurt than what he can direct to wise ends; but no man is wicked, or does wickedly, by necessity and fate. Though he may be restrained from doing so much wickedness as he would, yet all the wickedness he commits is his own free choice, even when it serves such ends as he never thought of; and therefore he is and acts like a free agent, notwithstanding the government of Providence.

(2.) Though God determines all events, all the good and evil that shall happen to men or nations, yet it is no more nor no other than what they themselves have deserved; and therefore they are under no other fate than what they themselves bring upon themselves by the good or bad use of their own liberty; that is, they are under no other fate than to be rewarded when they do well, and to be punished when they do ill: but this is the justice of Providence, not the necessity of fate. Those who do ill, and deserve ill, and suffer ill, might have done well, and have made themselves the favourites of Providence, and therefore are under no greater necessity of suffering ill, than they were of doing ill. The reason why God keeps all events in his own hands, is not because he has absolutely determined the fates of all men, but that he may govern the world wisely and justly, and reward and punish men according to their deserts, as far as the reasons of Providence require in this world. Now while the liberty of human actions is secured, and the events of Providence are not the execution of fatal, absolute, and unconditional decrees, but acts of government in the wise administration of justice, and dispensing rewards and punishments,—how absolute soever God's government be of all events, it is not necessity and fate, but a wise, and just, and absolute government. This, indeed, is what some of the wisest heathens called fate, and all that they meant by the name of fate, that God had fixed it by an irreversible decree, that good men should be rewarded and the wicked punished; and thus far we must all allow fate; and Providence

is only the minister and executioner of these fatal decrees; and to that end God keeps the government of all events in his own hands. Now whether we say, that God determines what good or evil shall befall men at the very time when they deserve it, or that foreseeing what good or evil they will do, and what they will deserve, did beforehand determine what good or evil should befall them,—this makes no alteration at all in the state of the question; for if all the good or evil that befalls men, have respect to their deserts, this is not fate, but a just and righteous judgment.

In a word, God's government of all events is indeed so absolute and uncontrollable, that no good or evil can befall any man, but what God pleases, what he orders and appoints for him; and this is necessary to the good government of the world and the care of all his creatures. But then God orders no good or evil to befall any men, but what they deserve, and what the wise ends of his providence require; and this is not fate, but a wise and just government of the world.

4. That the exercise of a particular providence consists in the government of all events.

I have often wondered at those philosophers who acknowledged a providence, but would not acknowledge God's particular care of all his creatures. Some confined his providence to the heavens, but would not extend it to this lower world; and yet this world needs a providence as much, and a great deal more, as being a scene of change and corruption, of furious lusts and passions, which need the restraints and government of Providence: no creatures need God's care more than the inhabitants of this earth; and if he take care of any of his creatures, one would think he should take most care of them who need it most.

Others, who would allow that the providence of God reached this lower world, yet confined God's care to the several kinds and species of beings, but would not extend it to every individual; as if God took care of logical terms, of genus and species, but took no care of his own creatures, which are all individuals; or as if God could take care of all his creatures, without taking care of any particular creature; i. e. that he could take care of all his creatures, without taking care of any one of them.

Thus they would allow God to take care of the great affairs of kingdoms and commonwealths, but to have no regard to particular men or families, unless they have made a great figure in the world; as if kingdoms and commonwealths were not made up of particular men and particular families; or that God could take care of the whole, without taking care of every part; or as if there were any other reason for taking care of the whole, but to take care of those particulars which make the whole. To talk of a general providence, without God's care and government of every particular creature, is manifestly unreasonable and absurd; for whatever reasons oblige us to own a providence, oblige us to own a particular providence.

If creation be a reason why God should preserve and take care of what he has made, this is a reason why he should take care of every creature, because there is no creature but what he made; and if the whole world consist of particulars, it must be taken care of in the care of particulars; for if all particulars perish, as they may do if no care be taken to preserve them, the whole must perish.

And there is the same reason for the government of mankind; for the whole is governed in the government of the parts; and mankind cannot be well governed, without the wise government of every particular man.

I am sure that the objections against a particular Providence are very foolish. Some think it too much trouble to God to take care of every particular; as if it were more trouble to him to take care of them, than it was to make them; or as if God had made more creatures than he could take care of; as if an infinite mind and omnipotent power were as much disturbed and tired with various and perpetual cares as we are. Others think it below the greatness and majesty of God, to take cognizance of every mean and contemptible creature, or of every private man; as if it were more below God to take care of such creatures than it is to make them; as if numbers made creatures considerable to God; that though one man is below God's care, yet a kingdom is worthy of his care and notice; when the whole world to God is but "as the drop of the bucket, and the small dust of the balance."

Now it is certain there can be no particular providence, without God's government of all events; for if any good or evil happen to any man without God's order and appointment, that is not providence, whatever other name you will give it: so that if God does take a particular care of all his creatures, this is a demonstration that he has the absolute government of all events; for without it he cannot take care of them: and if God have the government of all events, as the Scripture assures us he has, this confirms us in the belief of a particular providence; for if all the good or evil that happens to every particular man be appointed by God, that is proof enough that God takes care of every particular man. God's government of all particular events, and his care of all individuals, include each other in their very natures. The care of particular creatures consists in the government of all particular events; and the government of all events is the exercise of a particular providence, as our Saviour represents it, Matt. x. 29—31: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." Where God's particular providence over all his creatures is expressed by his particular care of all events, which extends even to the life of a sparrow, and to the hairs of our heads.

Thus much is certain, that without this belief, that God takes a particular care of all his creatures in the government of all events that can happen to them, there is no reason or pretence for most of the particular duties of religious worship. For most of the acts of worship consider God not merely as a universal cause, (could we form any notion of a general providence without any care of particular creatures or particular events,) but as our particular patron, protector, and preserver.

To fear God, and to stand in awe of his justice; to trust and depend on him in all conditions; to submit patiently to his will under all afflictions; to pray to him for the supply of our wants, for the relief of our sufferings, for protection and defence; to love and praise him for the blessings we enjoy, for peace, and plenty, and health, for friends and

benefactors, and all prosperous successes: I say these are not the acts of reasonable men, unless we believe that God has the supreme disposal of all events, and takes a particular care of us. For if any good or evil can befall us without God's particular order and appointment, we have no reason to trust in God, who does not always take care of us; we have no reason to bear our sufferings patiently at God's hands, and in submission to his will; for we know not whether our sufferings be God's will or not: we have no reason to love and praise God for every blessing and deliverance we receive, because we know not whether it came from God; and it is to no purpose to pray to God for particular blessings, if he does not concern himself in particular events. But if we believe that God takes a particular care of us all, and that no good or evil happens to us but as he pleases, all these acts of religious worship are both reasonable, necessary, and just. But of this, more hereafter.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING THE SOVEREIGNTY OF PROVIDENCE.

HAVING in the former chapter shown, that the government of the divine Providence consists in overruling and disposing all events; for the better understanding of this, and to prevent a great many ignorant objections against it, besides what I have already said, it will be necessary more particularly to explain the nature and essential characters and properties of God's governing providence. And I shall begin with

I. The sovereignty of providence. For God, being the sovereign Lord of the world, must govern with a sovereign will; for a sovereign Lord is a sovereign and absolute Governor. For which reason the Scripture so often resolves all things into *the sole will and pleasure of God*, and in many cases will allow us to seek for no other cause. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the

inhabitants of the earth." "Whatever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and in earth, in the seas and all deep places:" Dan. iv. 35; Ps. cxxxv. 6.

That the will of God is sovereign, and absolute, and unaccountable, needs no other proof, but that his power is absolute and his wisdom unsearchable; for absolute power makes an absolute will. He who has power to do whatever he will, can do whatever he will; and that is the definition of a sovereign and absolute will. And thus the Scripture resolves the sovereignty of God into power: that none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou? "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?" Job ix. 4.

And indeed a power which is supreme and absolute, which can do all things, and which has no greater power above it, none equal to it, has a right to sovereignty. For absolute power must be the maker of all things, and that must give an absolute right to all things; and that gives a right to absolute government, if there be any such thing as a natural right to government; for if God have a natural right to govern his creatures, he must have a right to absolute government; because the right he has in his creatures is absolute and uncontrollable. No creature has such an absolute power, and therefore no creature has such a sovereign and absolute will either; for how powerful soever any man is, God is more powerful than he, and can call him to an account; and no power, no will, which can be checked and controlled, and called to an account, is perfectly absolute.

And as absolute power makes the divine providence absolute and unaccountable, so does perfect and unerring wisdom; but for a different reason: absolute power has no superior power to give laws to it, and to call it to an account: perfect and unerring wisdom has no superior wisdom to take an account, or to judge of its actions; nothing can judge of wisdom but wisdom, and an inferior cannot comprehend a superior wisdom, especially when there is such a vast disproportion as there is between a finite and an infinite understanding, which must of necessity, in a thousand

instances, make "the judgments of God unsearchable," and "his ways past finding out." It neither becomes the infinite wisdom of God in all cases to give an account of his actions, nor the modesty of creatures to demand it, as Elihu tells Job: "Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters." Job xxxiii. 13.

But both these are thought very grievous by some men. They are terribly afraid of an absolute power which can do what it pleases, and justify whatever it does by an absolute and unaccountable will. Others are very uneasy that God does any thing without giving them the reason why he does it; and to be revenged of Providence, they will allow nothing to be wisely and justly done which they cannot comprehend. Every event which they cannot account for, they make an objection against Providence; and thus they may easily object themselves into atheism or infidelity; for they can never want such objections, while infinite and unsearchable wisdom governs the world.

Here, then, I shall lay the foundation of all, in justifying the sovereignty of Providence, which will justify every thing else. And I shall distinctly consider God's sovereign and absolute power, and his unsearchable and unaccountable wisdom.

1. Absolute power; and the very naming absolute power puts an end to the dispute about the extent of God's dominion over his creatures; for absolute power has no limits, and can have none; and therefore absolute dominion extends to all that absolute power can do. This is what mankind are afraid of, who judge of God's absolute power by the arbitrary and tyrannical government of some absolute monarchs. But true absolute power can do no wrong, cannot injure and oppress its creatures; but will do good and judge righteously, defend the innocent, and punish the wicked. If I can make it appear that this is the essential character of absolute power, it will make us infinitely secure in the divine Providence; for all men must grant that the power of God is absolute; and if this absolute power govern the world, the world must be very well and justly governed, if absolute power can do nothing but what is just and good. Now this is the natural notion which all mankind have of

supreme and absolute power, which is the supreme and natural Lord and Judge of the world. Thus Abraham reasoned with God, and therein spake the sense of mankind: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Gen. xviii. 25. If absolute power could do wrong, there were no certain redress of those wrongs and injuries which inferior powers do; for the last appeal must be to the greatest and most absolute power, and if that will not certainly rectify the injuries of inferior powers, but instead of that may do wrong itself, we cannot certainly promise ourselves ever to have right done us.

This shows how necessary it is, that absolute will and power should be absolute rectitude and justice, if there be any such thing as justice in nature. For absolute power is by nature the last and supreme judge; and the natural judge of right and wrong must be natural justice and rectitude, or else natural justice is a mere speculative notion, which can never be reduced to practice. For there never can be exact and perfect justice in the world, unless there be a judge who is exact and perfect justice. And if absolute will and power be not that judge, there can be none; for absolute power, if it be not absolutely and perfectly just, can do wrong, whoever else judges right.

But besides this, it is demonstrable *a priori*, that absolute power must be absolute rectitude and justice.

(1.) Because all infinite perfections, how different soever they are in our conceptions of them, are but one infinite being, which is absolutely perfect; and therefore in a being absolutely perfect, one absolute perfection can never be divided or separated from any other absolute perfection; and therefore absolute power can never be separated from absolute justice. For to say any being is absolutely perfect, (which is the most natural notion of God,) and yet that it wants any absolute perfection, is a contradiction; absolute will and absolute government are the most perfect will and most perfect government; and that is the most perfect justice and goodness, if justice and goodness be any perfections.

We must not judge of the absolute will and absolute government of God, by what we call absolute power in men

which is the foundation of all the mistakes about God's government. We find men apt to abuse their power, the more absolute it is, into tyranny and oppression; and this makes some afraid that God's absolute will and power may use his creatures very hardly also; but the case is very different, as different as the absolute power of men is from the absolute power of God.

What we call absolute power in men, is not absolute power, that is, it is not perfect power, it is not a power which can do all things; for there are infinite things which the most absolute prince has not power to do; and that is not absolute perfect power which cannot do all things. Absolute government among men, signifies only an uncontrollable liberty to do all that it will and can do—a will which is under no human restraints, which may will whatever it pleases, and do whatever it wills, as far as it can, but has not power to do all that it would. Now such an absolute will as this, which has not all power, may be very wild and extravagant, and far from willing always what is right and just; for such a will as this is no perfection; and therefore as it is separated from a truly absolute power, so it may be separated from rectitude and justice. Nay, such a will is not truly absolute, no more than its power; because there is a will, as there is a power above it; and no will is absolute which has a superior will to control it and to give laws to it; and yet God is higher than the highest, to whose sovereign will the most absolute princes are accountable, and therefore are not absolute themselves. Now reason tells us that a will which has a superior will and law, is not itself unerring rectitude and justice, and therefore may deviate from what is right and just, as experience tells us such absolute wills very often do; and when the will can choose wrong, the power, which is the minister of such an erring will, must do wrong also. But now reason tells us, that the supreme will must be the supreme law, that is, perfect and absolute justice, and therefore can no more will any thing that is unjust, than justice itself can be unjust; and if this absolute and sovereign will be absolute power, absolute power must be perfectly just and good, as being inseparable from perfect justice; and therefore the absolute power of

God can no more do any wrong, than his absolute will can choose it.

(2.) Nay, if we do but consider the nature of truly absolute power, which can do whatever it will, this alone may satisfy us, that God, who is this supreme powerful Being, can neither will nor do any wrong; for if we consider things well, we shall plainly see that though some degree of power is required to enable men to do wrong, yet it is always want of power which tempts them to do wrong.

There are two visible causes of all the injustice that is committed in the world, and both of them are the effects of weakness. 1. That men want power to do what they have a mind to do, without doing some wrong and injury to others. 2. That men are overpowered by their own passions to do what they ought not to do, and which they would not do, had they the perfect government of themselves.

As for the *first*, is there any man in the world, who is not a perfect brute, who does not wish that it were lawful for him to do what he has a mind to, and that he might have what he desires to have, without offering violence or injury to anybody? Would not a thief much rather choose to find a treasure, than to take a purse upon the road? Would not an ambitious and aspiring monarch rather choose that all princes should resign their crowns to him, and all nations become his subjects, than to be forced to win their crowns by his sword, and to make bloody conquests with the lamentable ravage and spoils of flourishing countries? Do not men intend to supply some real or imaginary want in all the injuries they do? And does not this suppose weakness and want of power, to want any thing else? For is it possible for absolute power to want? So impossible is it for absolute power to do any injury.

He who is the sole Lord and proprietor of the world, (as he is and must be, whose power is supreme and absolute,) he whose all creatures are, and whose wisdom and power can accomplish whatever he would have done, without doing the least injustice, can never be tempted to injure his own creatures, nor can ever want any thing which should tempt him to do an injury; and therefore absolute power must be absolute justice.

Secondly, All the injuries that are done are owing to the lusts and passions of men, which are the weaknesses even of human nature, when they are not under the government of reason. No man does any injury but to gratify some lust or passion; and that is a weak and impotent mind where passion reigns. Reason is the strength and vigour of the mind; and a man who lives by reason, never does any injury but through mistake, which is the weakness of reason. But now absolute power is not an external adventitious thing, but is a powerful nature, and a powerful nature is all power, and there can be no place for the rule and empire of passion; and if it be one passion or other which always does the injury, absolute power, which is void of passion, can do none.

Excepting a divine love, (which is the true image of the divine nature, and never does any injury, and ought not to be reckoned among the passions,) all our other passions are effects of weakness, and are arguments of a weak, limited, and confined nature.

Desire and hope prove that we want something which we cannot certainly bestow upon ourselves; fear is a sense of danger, which argues want of power to defend ourselves; anger and revenge are a resentment of some injuries we have received, and that argues want of power to suffer injuries; hatred and malice are but greater degrees of anger and revenge; and the greater they are, the greater sense they argue of fear and danger, of injuries either expected or received.

These are the passions which do all the mischief that is done in the world; and it is demonstrable, that absolute power is not capable of these injurious passions, can neither desire, nor hope, nor fear, can suffer no wants nor injuries, nor have any sense or resentment of them, and therefore there is no danger it should do any injury, it is acted by calm and steady wisdom, which is unerring justice too, which never did and never can do any injury. It is true, some of these passions are in Scripture attributed to God, such as anger, fury, hatred, revenge; for the Scripture speaks of God after the manner of men; but then all that this signifies is, that God will be as severe in his judgments as ange.

and revenge, though it is not passion in God, but a wise, and cool, and equal justice, which punishes; which may be as severe as anger and revenge, but never partial or unjust.

(3.) Nay, we may observe, that power itself is a great and generous principle, and inspires men with great and noble thoughts. Those whose power secures them from receiving any hurt, are never tempted to do any. Power, which is cruel, insolent, mischievous, is always conscious of its own weakness and danger; for it is commonly weakness and fear which makes men cruel; but a power which knows itself out of danger, out of the reach of envy, and ill-will, is always a very generous adversary, never insults over a prostrate enemy; for such great power makes all its enemies the objects of pity or scorn, and then they cease to be the objects of revenge. And if power, that little power which men have, gives them such a greatness of mind as sets them above affronts, and resentments, and sense of injuries; if this be so natural to power that it is always expected from men in power that they should have a greatness and generosity of mind proportioned to their power; that it is a reproach to them when it is not so, and makes them despised, and scorned, and hated, with all their power; what then may we expect from the perfect and absolute power of God? We may fear his justice, but have no reason to fear his power; justice will punish sinners, but his power will never oppress; for that is below his power, that is too mean and base a thing for perfect and absolute power to do: it is thought a reproach for a great and powerful man to oppress, much less then will the all-powerful God do so.

(4.) For to observe but one thing more; it is the glory of power to do good, not to do hurt; and if this be the natural glory of power, it is its natural perfection too, and the most natural exercise of it; and therefore it is that which perfect power will do. Its nature is to do good but never to do hurt; that if to punish were not to do good, perfect and absolute power could not punish.

If we rightly consider things, we must confess that it is a much greater power to do good than to do hurt; to save, than to destroy; to make so excellent a creature as man is,

and to maintain and preserve him in being, than to kill him: in most cases it requires very little power to do hurt; every man, how weak and inconsiderable soever he is, has a great deal of power to do hurt; but there are very few who can do much good; and therefore it is plain that to do good is the greater power, and therefore to do good must be essential to the greatest power. It is certain, that to do good is the most glorious power, because good is in itself a beautiful, lovely, and glorious thing, but evil is very inglorious. All creatures love to receive good, they feel it, they rejoice in it, they adore and praise their Maker and great Benefactor, they live in him, they depend on him, they fly to him to supply their wants, they take refuge and sanctuary in his power, and think themselves safe under his wings. And can there possibly be a more lovely idea and representation of power than this? A power which makes the world and all the creatures in it: which contrives their natures with all variety of art and wisdom, and with very different capacities of happiness, according to the different excellencies and perfections of their natures, and provides for them all with a bounteous hand: this is great and excellent power indeed, which gives being, and preserves it, and provides daily for such infinite numbers and variety of creatures as are in the world; this is the lovely and charming idea of a God; but an arbitrary, lawless power, which tyrannizeth over creatures, which can do what mischief it pleases, and delights to do it, is a very terrible thing indeed, but not glorious; it is what all creatures must fear, and hate, and fly from, not praise and adore. So that if we will allow the most perfect and absolute power to be the most glorious, as we must do if we acknowledge power to be glorious, then the most absolute power must be the most kind and beneficent thing in the world; for this is the glory of power, to do good.

Thus we see in what sense absolute will and power can do no wrong, because the will and power of God, which is the only absolute will and power, is absolute rectitude and justice, and absolute goodness too. Absolute power can do no wrong, because it can never will nor choose to do

any wrong; not because power can make that just and right which without such absolute power would have been wrong; for no power can make right to be wrong, nor wrong to be right. Good and evil, just and unjust, are of an eternal and unchangeable nature, not made so by power, but in their notion antecedent to power, and the natural rule and measure of it. The will of God is eternal justice and goodness, and therefore his will is the eternal rule of justice and goodness; and therefore in propriety of speech, when we speak of God we can neither say that God wills any thing because it is just and good, or that it is just and good because God wills it, both which imply a distinction between the will of God, and justice and goodness, which in the divine nature are the same; but since the imperfection of our understandings cannot admit one simple notion and idea of an infinite mind, but must apprehend every thing by distinct conceptions in God, as we do in creatures; it is more agreeable to the nature of things, to make good and evil antecedent to the will of God, and the rule of his will and choice, because this asserts the unchangeable nature of good and evil, and the inflexible justice and holiness of the Divine will, that God never can will any thing but what is just and good, and never wills any thing for any other reason, but because it is just and good; whereas, to make justice and goodness to depend wholly upon the will of God, that therefore any thing is just and good because God wills it, supposes that justice and goodness have no stable nature of their own, but may at any time change its nature with the will of God; and it is impossible to prove that the will of God cannot change as the wills of men do, if it have no eternal and unchangeable rule, or be not eternal and unchangeable justice and goodness itself.

When we speak of God after the manner of men, our words must be expounded to the same sense, excepting metaphorical and figurative expressions, as when they are used of men; now we all know what a vast difference there is between these two expressions, when used of men. Such a man always wills and chooses what is good and just; and he makes every thing good and just by willing it; the first supposes a certain and invariable rule of good and evil; the

second resolves the nature of good and just into arbitrary will and pleasure.

And it is the very same case, when we speak of God's power, which is nothing else but the execution of his will. God's absolute power can do nothing but what is just and good; but we must not therefore say, that absolute power makes every thing it does, just and good; as if power were not regulated by justice and goodness, but were the rule of it.

There is great reason curiously to distinguish in this matter, because there are a sort of Christians who attribute such things to God as are irreconcilable with all the notions we have of justice and goodness; and think to silence all objections, and to justify all, by the sovereign dominion and absolute power of God, which can do no wrong: but if it be a wrong to creatures to be eternally miserable for no other reason but the will and pleasure of God, I cannot but think the absolute decrees of reprobation to be very unjust, and the execution of such decrees to be doing wrong, how absolute soevér the power be that does it.

And I confess I cannot but wonder, that men who make the glory of God the end of all his actions, (as certainly it is, when rightly understood,) should attribute such things to God as all the rest of mankind think very inglorious. That when the truest and greatest glory of absolute power, as you have already heard, is to do the greatest good, they should think it sufficient to justify such actions as they have no other way to prove good and just, merely by absolute power. The glory of absolute power is to do what all the world acknowledges to be good and just; and therefore absolute power cannot prove those actions to be good and just, nor make itself glorious, by doing such actions as mankind think very infamous and unjust.

Let us then lay down this as the foundation of all, that how unaccountable soever sovereign and absolute will and power are, they neither can nor will do any wrong; for they are nothing else but absolute and sovereign justice, and goodness. We have no reason to be afraid of the absolute power of God, no more than we have to be afraid of his absolute goodness. Absolute power is the only security we

have against suffering wrong; for it will do no wrong itself, but will rectify all the wrongs which are done by inferior powers, which none but a sovereign and absolute power can do. The firm belief of this will give great relief and satisfaction to our minds, under all the unaccountable passages of Providence; for though absolute power be always just and good, yet *its ways are* sometimes *past finding out.*

2. Let us now consider, how unsearchable the wisdom of Providence is, which "doth great things past finding out, and wonders without number:" Job ix. 10. Which may satisfy us, how impossible it is for such ignorant creatures as we are, to comprehend all the wise reasons of providence; and how impious it is to reproach and censure what we do not and cannot understand.

We all know the history of Job, and the dispute between him and his three friends. God exercised Job with very severe and amazing sufferings for the trial of his virtue; his friends conclude from his great sufferings, that though his life were visibly very innocent and virtuous, yet he had been a secret hypocrite, because God did not use to punish good men, but only the wicked in such a manner. On the other hand, Job testifies his own innocence, and asserts more truly, that bad men were many times very prosperous, and good men great sufferers in this world, he complains very tragically of his sufferings, and that he could not understand the reason why God dealt thus with him; and this seems to be Job's fault, that he insisted too much on his own justification, and instead of vindicating the divine Providence, seems to accuse God of a causeless and unaccountable severity; for which Elihu so severely reproved him. At last, God answers Job himself, as he had often desired he would: but instead of a particular justification of his Providence, or of giving Job the reasons for which he had thus afflicted him, he gives him some sensible proofs of his own great and admirable wisdom and power in the works of nature; which Job was so far from being able to imitate, that he could not understand how they were done: the force of which argument is this, that so weak and ignorant a creature as man is, ought not to censure the divine Providence, how mysterious and unaccountable soever it be; when the very works of nature con-

vince us, that God is infinitely wiser and more powerful than we are: this should teach us great modesty, and humility to adore the divine judgments, not to censure what we cannot understand; for the power and wisdom of God can do great and excellent things, above our understandings.

"Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt:" Job xi. 12. They are impatient to think that God should do any thing which they cannot understand, and yet there is not any one thing in nature which they do understand: and if we cannot understand the mysteries of nature, why should we expect to understand all the unsearchable depths and mysteries of Providence? If the wisdom of God be unsearchable, why should we not allow his wisdom in governing the world, to be as unsearchable as his wisdom in making it? For an incomprehensible wisdom will do incomprehensible things, whatever it employs itself about; and when we know, that if the world be governed at all, it is governed by an infinite and incomprehensible wisdom, there is no reason to wonder that there are many events of providence which we cannot fathom, and much less reason to deny a providence, because we cannot comprehend the reasons of all events.

But this is a matter of such vast consequence, to silence the skeptical humour of the age, and to shame those trifling and ridiculous pretences to wit and philosophy, in censuring the wisdom and justice of Providence, that it deserves a more particular discourse: for could we make men confess what all modest, considering men must blush to deny, that the wisdom of God is unsearchable; this would put an end to all the disputes about Providence, and teach us humbly to adore and reverence that wisdom which we cannot comprehend.

And to prepare my way to give such full satisfaction in this matter, as you may securely acquiesce in, without disputing the reasons of Providence, or being tempted to deny a Providence, when you meet with any difficulties too hard for you, I shall show you how impossible it is that it should be otherwise, both from the infinite wisdom of God, and our own great ignorance of things, which makes the providence of God in many cases, so much above our understandings, that we are not capable of such knowledge.

And first, I shall show you what reason we have securely to acquiesce in the unsearchable wisdom of Providence, and to trust God beyond our own knowledge, because we are certain that infinite wisdom can never err, or mistake, or do wrong. Secondly, That the wisdom of Providence must be as unsearchable and unaccountable to us, as the wisdom of the creation. Thirdly, That the wise government of the world requires secret and hidden methods of Providence; and therefore, at least in this present state, we ought not to expect or desire a particular account or reason of all events. Fourthly, That our ignorance of other matters, the knowledge of which is absolutely necessary to understand the reasons of Providence, makes us utterly incapable of such knowledge in this state. Fifthly, I shall inquire in what cases this is a reasonable answer to all difficulties, "That the judgments of God are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out."

1. That infinite wisdom, how unsearchable and unaccountable soever its ways are, can do no wrong. As I observed before, that God's absolute power is absolute rectitude and justice; so all men must grant that infinite and perfect wisdom is always in the right, for to be in the wrong, is ignorance and mistake. If infinite wisdom will always judge, and choose, and act wisely, it is then impossible that infinite wisdom should ever do wrong; for to do wrong is either not to judge, or not to choose wisely. In Scripture, all kinds of wickedness is called folly, and sinners fools, and to learn wisdom is prescribed as the only remedy against vice; "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding:" and the reason and nature of things prove it must be so; for all men who do wickedly must either mistake their rule, or mistake their interest; must either call vice virtue, and virtue vice, or think to make themselves happy by being wicked; which is a stupid ignorance of the nature and the natural effects of the consequences of things. Now if all wickedness be ignorance and folly, infinite and perfect wisdom must be perfect rectitude, justice, and goodness; it can never do any wrong, because it can never be ignorant of what is right.

And what greater security can creatures possibly have, that

in the last great issue of things they shall suffer no wrong, than to know that they are under the care and government of infinite wisdom, that can do no wrong? Infinite wisdom, indeed, is incomprehensible to a finite mind; the methods of it may seem intricate and perplexed to us, full of mystery and surprising events, and thus it must be, while infinite wisdom governs the world, which is so much above the reach of our most improved and elevated thoughts; but would not any wise man rather choose to be governed by such a perfect and excellent wisdom as can never mistake, though it vastly exceed his understanding, than to be governed by a being no wiser, or not much wiser than himself, all whose counsels he can fathom and see to the end of? The more perfect and excellent the wisdom is, the less we can understand it, but the more safe we are under its conduct: so absurd is it to complain, that we cannot understand all the depths and secrets of Providence, that we may as reasonably complain that an excellent and incomprehensible wisdom takes care of the world, and of all the creatures that are in it.

While we know ourselves safe in the hands of infinite wisdom, let us be contented that God should do such things as we cannot understand the reason of. Are we ever the less happy and perfect creatures because we know not how God made us, how he formed and fashioned us in the womb, and breathed into us the breath of life? And what hurt is it to us, if God preserve and govern the world, and take care of all the creatures in it, by as unknown and incomprehensible a wisdom, as that which at first gave being to us? We find ourselves wisely made, though we know not how God made us; and in the conclusion of all, we shall find and feel ourselves very happy, if we follow God, and adhere to him, though we may not understand the reasons of all intermediate events, nor the several steps and advances of Providence to make us happy.

It is great pride and as contemptible folly, to think that if there be a God who is infinitely wise, he should not be able to do things above our understanding, and to do them very wisely too, though we do not understand them: let men value their understandings ever so highly, and think

scorn, that any thing should be above their knowledge, yet it is certain that there are ten thousand things, both in the works of nature and providence, which no man fully understands, and yet which bear the marks and signatures of a most divine and admirable art and wisdom; and since whether we will or no we must confess our own ignorance, why should we not be as well contented to allow that God can do such things as are above our understanding, as that there should be such things done, we know not how, nor by whom? Is it not a greater reproach to our understandings, that blind chance should do such things as all our wit and philosophy cannot comprehend, than to attribute such events to the art and government of infinite wisdom? Which is most reasonable, to attribute such works as are above our understanding to the infinite wisdom of God, or to deny that they had any wise cause because we cannot find out the causes of them, though we can discern such wisdom in them, as no human art or wisdom can imitate?

Indeed, the passion of admiration which is implanted in all men, if it be not utterly vain, is a plain natural indication that there is something above our natural understandings which we must admire, but cannot comprehend; for the proper object of admiration is art and wisdom, a wisdom vastly greater than our own; and therefore if this natural passion have a natural object, it is certain there is a wisdom greater than our own, which no human understanding can comprehend; such a wisdom as doth "great and wondrous things, and things past finding out."

The sum is this: infinite wisdom is and must be unaccountable, her ways are unsearchable and past finding out, and therefore we must be contented in many cases to be ignorant of the reasons of Providence; and we have great reason to be so, since we are so secure that infinite wisdom will always act wisely, and consult the general good of the world and the happiness of particular creatures, though by methods secret and incomprehensible to us: which teaches us not to deny or censure Providence, when we do not understand the reasons of it; but in an entire belief of the wisdom of God, quietly to submit to all events, and to adore and reverence his judgments with an implicit faith.

2. The better to satisfy us in a profound veneration of the wisdom of Providence, even with respect to the most unaccountable passages of it, we must consider that it is impossible we should be able to comprehend it; that we cannot know more of God's governing the world than we do of his making it: That the unsearchable wisdom of God's works makes the wisdom of Providence unsearchable also.

This is supposed in God's answer to Job, when to make him sensible how little he understood of the wise ends and designs of Providence, he convinced him how ignorant he was of the works of nature;—chapters xxxviii.—xli. "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding, who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner-stone thereof? Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the day-spring to know his place? Where is the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof?—Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail? hath the rain a father? and who hath begotten the drops of the dew? out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it?" By these and such like questions, expressed in inimitable words, God convinces Job how ignorant he was of the most common and familiar works of nature: which made it great presumption in so ignorant a creature to censure the wisdom of Providence. And the force of the argument does not only consist in this, that the very works of nature convince us that God is infinitely wiser than we are, and can do great and excellent things which are above our understanding, and therefore that we never ought to censure any thing that God does, because he is so much wiser than we are, that we are not competent judges of what he does, which is an unanswerable argument to teach us the most profound re-

verence and the most absolute resignation of ourselves to God: but the force of this argument reaches farther, that our ignorance of the works of nature is both the cause and the proof of our great ignorance of the works of Providence. For no being can know how to govern a world, who does not know how to make it; and he who does not know how to govern the world himself, is a very unfit judge of the wisdom of Providence, for he can never know when the world is well and wisely governed, because he does not know what belongs to the government of the world.

The wise government of all creatures must be proportioned to their natures; and therefore without understanding the philosophy of nature, the springs of motion, the mutual dependence of causes and effects, what end things are made for, and what uses they serve, we can never know what is fit to be done, nor what can be done, or by what means it is to be done; and then can never tell when any thing is done as it should be: we know not what the rules, nor what the ends of God's government are, which makes it impossible to judge of the wisdom of government: without understanding the natures of things, we must of necessity make as wild conjectures about Providence, as a blind man does of light and colours. As for instance; how is it possible to talk a wise word about God's government of mankind; in what manner and by what means he turns their hearts, directs and influences their counsels, suggests thoughts to them, and foresees their thoughts, and how they will determine themselves; when we know so little of the make and frame of our own minds; where the spring of thoughts is, and how we connect propositions and draw consequences; what the power of the will is; how we determine ourselves in different matters where the balance is equal? For though we feel all these powers in ourselves, yet we know not whence they are, nor how they act.

And yet how many intricate questions are there, relating to the disputes of Providence, which are wholly owing to such nice philosophical speculations, which we know nothing of, and yet which some men perplex themselves with, and undertake very gravely to determine.

Such are the disputes about necessity and fate, prescience

and predetermination, and the liberty of human actions; which, as they are differently determined, make very different and contrary hypotheses of providence, and either charge God with the sins of men, or acquit him from any partnership in wickedness.

For all these questions at last resolve themselves into this,—how the mind of man acts and determines itself? Whether it be determined from abroad, from a necessary train and series of fatal events, or from the decrees and predetermination or foreknowledge of God? Or whether it be a self-moving being, and determines itself from the principles of its own nature and its own free choice? Now, unless we understood the philosophy or the natural frame and composition of our own minds, it is impossible to say any thing to the purpose in this cause, any farther than our own sense and feeling go, and that is on the side of liberty; for unless we be strangely imposed on, we feel ourselves free. But this may satisfy us, that as to all the difficulties of providence, which can be no other way resolved but by a knowledge of nature, we must of necessity be as ignorant of them as we are of the nature of things; and therefore our confessed ignorance of nature, is a good argument in all such cases, to make us very modest in censuring Providence.

We know enough, both of the works of nature and of the works of providence, to serve all the wise ends and purposes of living, which is all that is useful for us to know, and all that God intended we should know; but the reasons and causes of things belong only to that wisdom which can make and govern a world. We know as much of providence as we do of nature; and would men set bounds to their inquiries here, which is as far as human understanding can reach, we should hear very few objections against providence.

Our ignorance of nature, and natural causes, and the natural springs of motion, how things were made, and how they act, and for what ends they were made, which in many cases we do but very imperfectly guess at,—is a plain demonstration that we never ought to admit any difficulties in nature as a sufficient objection against the being or the

providence of God, in bar to all the moral evidence and assurance we have of both.

We have all the moral evidence we can have for any thing, that God governs the world by a wise and holy, and free providence; that he is not the author of sin; that our wills, at least as far as virtue and vice are concerned, are under no foreign force and constraint, but choose, and refuse, and determine themselves with a natural liberty. I say we have undeniable evidence of this, from the wisdom, justice, and holiness of the Divine nature, from the difference between virtue and vice, and the nature of rewards and punishments: these things are plain, and such as we can understand, and such as we cannot deny with any fair appearance of reason; but now all the arguments against providence, and for necessity and fate, are mere philosophical speculations, which men vainly pretend to, when it is demonstrable they can know nothing of them. As for instance, some tell us that it is not a wise and free Providence that governs the world, but that all things come to pass by a necessary chain of causes, which fatally determine the will to choose and act as these causes move it. Now, whether there be such a necessary chain of causes or not, it is certain no man can know it, who does not as perfectly understand this great machine of the world, and all its motions, as an artist does all the wheels in a watch or clock: nor can any man know how such a chain of causes should move and determine the mind of man, without understanding the philosophy of human souls, how the will is moved, how it is determined, or determines itself; whether, by the constitution of its nature, it always necessarily chooses what it chooses, or might have not chosen, or have chosen any thing else. Now, whatever other men may do, I am sure I know nothing of the philosophy of these matters, and therefore they do not concern me.

Others make God himself to be nothing else but necessity and fate, who, by eternal and irreversible decrees, as necessary and essential to him as his own being, has determined whatever shall come to pass; but no man can pretend to know this, without an immediate vision, if I may so speak, of the naked essence of God. His attributes and

moral perfections give us no notice of such fatal decrees: his wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, contain nothing of fate and necessity; and those who can see the very essence of God to be fate, must be able to contemplate his pure essence, and to know God after another manner than he ever yet manifested himself to creatures, or, it may be, than it is possible for God to show himself to creatures.

Others conclude the fatal necessity of all events, from God's prescience; for they say that God can foreknow things only in his own decrees, and therefore if God foreknows all things, all things are decreed; or, however, what God foreknows will come to pass, will certainly and necessarily come to pass, and therefore all events are certain and necessary, if they be all foreknown by God. But these are conclusions which no man can be certain of, without pretending perfectly to understand the nature of prescience, or how God foreknows things to come; for if God can foreknow what he has not decreed, and can foreknow what does not come to pass necessarily, then the prescience of God does not infer a fatality of all events: and yet this may be, for ought we know, unless we perfectly understand the nature of prescience, and how God foreknows things to come, and then we may foreknow things ourselves. The like may be said of God's concourse with his creatures in all their actions, from whence they conclude that the will of man in all its elections is determined by God, without whose concourse it cannot act nor determine itself.

These are all nice philosophical speculations, which creatures who are so ignorant of the natures of things can know nothing of; and therefore they are not fit to be made arguments for or against any thing.

The sum is this: that since we must confess ourselves so very ignorant of the works of nature, without the knowledge of which, in ten thousand instances, it is impossible to understand the wisdom of Providence, it is unreasonable and absurd for us to demand an account of God's providences; but we ought to be satisfied, to leave God to govern the world with the same sovereign and unaccountable wisdom which at first gave being to all things.

3. That the wise government of the world requires se-

cret and hidden methods of providence; and therefore, at least in this state, we ought not to expect or desire a particular account or reason of all events.

The wise man tells us, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing:" Prov. xxv. 2. It is the glory of the divine nature, that it is incomprehensible by us; and it is the glory of the Divine providence to be unsearchable; and therefore many of the ancient philosophers and poets forbid too curious an inquiry into the nature or providence of God; and Sophronius gives a wise reason for it, because we are all born of mortal parents, and therefore the perfect knowledge of an infinite immortal Being must be above us: which is much the same reason that Zophar gives: "Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt:" Job xi. 12. This is a knowledge too great for our birth, if our natural capacities bear proportion to it; for God must be a very little being himself, could he be comprehended by such mean creatures.

But that which I at present intend, is only to show you that the wise government of the world requires that the divine counsels, that the events and reasons of Providence should in a great measure be concealed from us; and I hope that is a satisfactory reason, why God should conceal them, if he cannot so wisely govern the world without it.

I would desire those persons who are so apt to quarrel at Providence, and to take it so very ill that God does any thing which they do not presently understand, to sit down and agree among themselves how they would have God govern the world; what it is that they would be pleased with: but let them consider well of it beforehand, that upon second thoughts they do not find more reason to quarrel at their own ways and methods of governing the world, than they now have to quarrel with Providence; or that the rest of mankind do not find more reason to quarrel with them, than they have now to quarrel with God. As to give an instance or two of this by way of essay.—

Some seem to be very much discontented at the unevenness and uncertainty of all events; that all things are in a perpetual flux and motion; that no man knoweth what a day or an hour will bring forth: the instability of fortune which

gives and takes away, and every day shows a new face, and opens new and surprising scenes, has been an old complaint.

Well, then, would they have this rectified? would they have all the events of providence as constant, and regular, and unchangeable, as the motions of the heavens, as the returns of day and night, of winter and summer? and when they see all things happen thus evenly and regularly, will they then promise to believe a providence? I mightily suspect that they will be farther from believing a providence then, than they are now. We see that the regular motions of the heavens, and the uniform productions of nature, which so seldom vary, that it is thought portentous and ominous if they do, cannot convince them that God governs the heavens and the earth, and all the works of nature, as far as all their virtues and powers move and act uniformly, by constant and unerring laws: and if the regular uniformity of nature is not thought by these men a sufficient proof of a providence, I doubt a constant and uniform round of all events would be thought much less so. Those who now resolve all the uncertain changes and revolutions that happen, into necessity and fate, would have more reason to do so, did providence always show the same face and appearances as the heavens do.

But can they tell what kind of uniformity and stability of providence it is, would please them? Would they have all men's fortunes equal? That there should be no distinction between rich and poor, high and low, princes and subjects, the honorable and the vile? I believe few of them would like such a levelling providence, which, as the state of mankind now is, would destroy the good government of the world, and most of the pleasures and conveniences of life; and yet, without this, the providence of God is not so uniform towards men as it is toward beasts; and those who fare worse than others of the same nature with them, will still complain.

If then providence must not deal alike by all men, do they mean by the uniformity and stability of providence, that men's fortunes, whatever they are, shall always be the same? That the rich and prosperous shall always be rich

and prosperous, and the poor always poor, and beggars and slaves? Unless these objectors be all rich and happy, I doubt they will never agree to this; for the poor and miserable must needs think it hard usage to be always poor, without room for better hopes.

But such a stability of providence as this would destroy the wise and just government of the world; for how should God restrain and punish wickedness, and reward and encourage virtue, if the rich must always be rich, and the poor always poor? nay, how can the providence of God do this, without making men virtuous and vicious too, by necessity and fate? When wantonness and prodigality, idleness and folly, will spend or lose an estate; and frugality, prudence and diligence will get one. And when all men in this world must not be equal, does it not more become the wisdom and justice of Providence, that men's own virtues and vices shall in a great measure make the distinction, and carve out their own fortunes for them?

So that when men complain of the uncertainty and instability of fortune, as they call it, they complain of they know not what; and were it put to their own choice what to have in the room of it, they would not know how to mend the matter. The wise government of free agents, who so often change themselves, requires very frequent, sudden, surprising turns of providence, the reasons of which must of necessity be as invisible to us as the thoughts of men's hearts, and their most secret intrigues and counsels. Till we can make men all move alike, as regularly and uniformly as the heavenly bodies do, it is an absurd and unreasonable complaint that providence does not act regularly, and that the events of providence are not always the same.

Another great complaint against providence is, that good men are not always rewarded, nor bad men punished according to their deserts: that many bad men are prosperous in this world, and some good men great sufferers: that "all things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath:" Eccl. ix. 2. This

makes the events of providence very sudden, mysterious, and unaccountable; that no man knows what course to take to make his life easy and prosperous; for whether he be good or wicked, he may be happy or miserable, as it happens.

As for the objection itself, I shall consider it more hereafter; but at present I will only ask these objectors, whether, to remove these difficulties and uncertainties of providence, and that they may the better understand the reasons of all events, they do in good earnest desire, that God would reduce this matter to a certainty, by punishing all bad men, and rewarding all good men in this world, according to their deserts? If they do, I must tell them, as Christ told the two brethren, who desired that they might sit one on his right hand, and the other on his left, in his kingdom,—"Ye ask ye know not what." They ask the most dangerous thing that could possibly befall mankind; and what they ask would be ten thousand times a greater objection against providence than what they complain of. Should every sinner be punished in this world according to his deserts, what man is there so just and innocent as to escape the Divine vengeance? "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand!" Ps. cxxx. 3. Were every sinner punished as he deserves, I doubt there would be no good man left to be rewarded; for where is the man that doth good, and sinneth not? What room does this leave for patience or forbearance, for the repentance of sinners, for God's pardoning grace and mercy. And what a terrible providence is this? How contrary to all the notions we have of God, and his kind and gracious government of his creatures.

I grant God may exercise great patience and long suffering towards sinners; he may forgive the sins of true penitents, and yet punish sinners, and reward good men, even in this world; these things are very reconcilable in God's government of the world, for thus he does govern the world; but they are very irreconcilable with such a providence and government as these men desire, which requires a present and visible punishment of every sin, as soon as committed; and as present and visible a reward of every good action; for unless these punishments and rewards are present, all

the time they are delayed bad men may be prosperous and good men afflicted: which is their very objection against providence; which can never be removed, but by speedy and visible executions, which leave no place for the patience and forgiveness of God, or for the repentance of sinners: and is it not much more desirable, for ever to be ignorant of the reasons of providence, than to have such proofs and demonstrations of providence as this?

Let me desire these unthinking cavillers at providence, to review their objection over again, and consider what is the meaning of every word in it, and how upon second thoughts they like it themselves.

That they may have a plain and certain reason of God's judgments, they desire that no man may suffer any external calamity, but only for sin; and that every sinner may be punished in this world according to his deserts; and then they will believe that there is a providence that governs the world; though it is better for the world that they should continue infidels, than be thus convinced. Well, then, who in the first place are these sinners whom they would have punished? Do they mean every one who does a wicked action? or every impenitent and incorrigible sinner?

If every one who at any time does any wicked action must be punished for it, then it is plain that no man can escape; then there is no place for repentance or forgiveness, but a speedy vengeance must pursue the sinner; and God knows, we are all sinners, and must all be punished; and if this removes one objection against providence, I am sure it will very much increase another, from the many evils and miseries that are in the world, which will be many more, and much greater, if every sin must receive its just punishment.

If they mean only, that impenitent and incorrigible sinners must be punished, then they must allow that God may spare a sinner a great while, and then very great sinners may be prosperous a great while, and if they repent at last, may finally escape the judgments of God; and then the prosperity of sinners can never be an argument against providence, unless they can prescribe to God just how long and no longer he may justly spare sinners.

It is an easy matter to complain of any thing, and to start difficulties and objections, but it is impossible for the wit of man to reduce providence to such a certainty as these men desire. Though God govern the world by ever such fixed and steady laws, we can never see it in external events, so as to be able to assign a reason of all that good and evil which happen to particular men.

For would they have God reward every good man, and punish every wicked man, or reward and punish every man for the good and evil that he does? There is a great mixture of good and bad in most men, that for different reasons they may deserve both rewards and punishments; and though God knows when it is fit to reward or punish such men, yet it is impossible we should: and therefore whether they be rewarded or punished, we can give no account of it.

There is also a great mixture of good and bad in most actions: some very bad actions may not deserve punishment, as being the effect of ignorance or surprise, or such invincible temptations as human nature, without an extraordinary measure of grace, cannot conquer; and there are a great many good actions which deserve no reward, as being done by chance, besides the intention of the doer, or done from a very bad principle, or for very bad ends. Now we only see the good or evil that is in the action, and human laws can punish or reward nothing but what is seen.

But I suppose you will not say that God ought to regard nothing else but the material and visible action; and then it may be very wise and just in God neither to punish men for very bad actions, nor to reward them for very good actions; and this is another uncertainty of events, which men ignorantly complain of.

Thus some men are guilty of a great many secret sins, or do a great many good actions, which no man knows of, but only God, and their own consciences; and when God visibly rewards or punishes men for the secret good or evil they have done, the reasons of such rewards or punishments must be unknown to us, because the good or evil for which they are rewarded or punished is unknown.

All these things make the reasons and events of providence very uncertain and unaccountable to us; and yet we

see there may be very wise reasons for them, which we cannot understand, and which no man in his wits would desire should be understood.

For would you desire that every sin you commit should be immediately punished, without any time to repent, without any hope of mercy? Would you have God reward and punish as human laws do, to consider only what is done, without making any allowances for ignorance or surprise, or without taking any notice of the principles or ends of our actions? Would you have a casement into every man's breast, or have all their secret sins or virtues written upon their foreheads, that every man may be as perfectly known to all the world as he is to himself? If you do not desire this, you must be contented to be ignorant of the reasons of Providence, of those good and evil events which happen to men; why God punishes one man, and spares or rewards another; why he does not punish those whom we judge to deserve punishment, nor reward those whom we think worthy of a reward. God has wise reasons for all this, but we cannot understand them, and it is happy for us all that they are not understood.

This shows how absurd it is for us to demand a reason, and to complain that we cannot give a reason of all the events of providence. And I shall only observe this by the way, that if men would in other cases take the same course that I have done in this, they would quickly perceive how vain and senseless all their objections against providence are; that is, whatever they object against providence, let them turn the other side of it, and try whether that would be better: let them consider how they would have what they call the defects and blemishes of providence rectified, and whether it would be more for the wise and happy government of the world, if it were so. I dare challenge the greatest pretenders to wit and reason, to give any one instance of this nature, to name any one thing which they quarrel at, which they know how to mend; and if the world be so wisely ordered already, that those who complain most cannot tell how any thing could be better done, it is ridiculous and impudent to find fault—which are no hard words in such a cause as this.

But this is not all I intend, merely to show that this is an unreasonable objection against providence, that the events of it are many times very uncertain, hidden and mysterious, and such as we cannot give the particular reasons of; but likewise to satisfy you, that the wise government of mankind requires it should be so, and to represent to you the great and excellent advantages of it.

Now I suppose you will all grant that what is most for the glory of God, for the advancement of true piety, and the restraints of wickedness, is the wisest way of governing the world. And if you will grant this, I doubt not but I shall presently satisfy you that the wise government of the world requires secret and hidden methods of providence, such uncertain and surprising events, as at least we can give no account of, till it comes to its last and concluding issue.

(1.) For what is there that excites in us a greater admiration of God, than to see great and glorious things brought to pass by a long and winding labyrinth of surprising and perplexed events, which we know nothing of, nor whither they tend, till we see where they end? Mankind never greatly admire what is plain and obvious, and every man's thought, because there is nothing in it which shows any extraordinary contrivance; but when unexpected events are brought to pass by unsuspected means, and yet designed and directed by a steady and unerring counsel—when great things are done by such means as have no natural causality to produce such events, and therefore can give no notice nor the least suspicion of what is a-doing—when our very fears are turned into triumphs, and that which seemed to threaten us with some great evils, is made the instrument of some great and surprising blessings—when bad men are ensnared in their own counsels, and fall into the pit which they have dug for others—when God turns their curses into blessings, and saves good men by the ministry of those who intended their ruin:—these, I say, and such like events, of which there are numerous instances both in sacred and profane story, and which our own observation may furnish us with fresh examples of, justly give us great and admiring thoughts of the Divine wisdom—a wisdom which is to be reverenced and feared, as well as praised; for who would

not fear that God, "who is wise in heart, as well as mighty in strength? Who hath resisted his will, and prospered?"

(2.) The uncertain events of providence, that good and evil are promiscuously dispensed—that God does not always visibly reward the good, nor punish the wicked, though he signally rewards some good men, and as remarkably punishes some wicked men,—is the wisest method of governing mankind. That some good men are visibly rewarded in this world, is a just encouragement to good men to expect the protection and blessing of God in doing good. That some bad men are made examples of a just and terrible vengeance, is a warning to all bad men to reverence the judgments of God, and to stand in awe of him: and that some bad men are spared, nay, are externally happy, is a good reason for men to repent, and to hope for pardon and forgiveness from so patient and merciful a God.

The essential difference between good and evil, the hopes and fears of natural conscience, the promises and threatenings of Scripture, and the Scripture examples of those miraculous deliverances which God has wrought for his people, and the miraculous destruction he has brought upon their enemies, are a plain proof that even the external prosperity of good men, is a mark of God's favour to them; and the external sufferings and calamities of bad men, the effects of his anger and vengeance; and then, though all good men are not so visibly rewarded in this world, nor all bad men punished, yet since no good men are excepted from God's promises, nor any bad men from his threatenings, the rewards of some good men are a reason for all good men to hope, and the judgments executed upon some bad men are a reason for all bad men to fear.

And this is better accommodated to the nature of man, who is a free agent, than if God should visibly punish all bad men and reward all good men in this world, because it offers less force and violence to men, and leaves them more to the government of their own free choice. Should God make such a visible difference between all good and bad men in this world, that all good men should be prosperous and happy, and all bad men miserable, there would be no more choice left to men, whether they would be good or

bad, than whether they would spend their lives in health or sickness, in riches or poverty, in honour or disgrace; but where the event is not certain, there is room left for wise consideration, for hopes and fears, which are the natural springs of a free choice.

And besides this, that all good men are not rewarded, nor all bad men punished in this world, gives us a truer understanding of the nature of present things, and reasonable expectations of greater rewards and punishments hereafter. We should be too apt to think that the enjoyments of this life were the best and greatest things, and the peculiar mark of God's favour, did none but good men share in them; and were they the portion of all good men, we should grow very fond of this world, and little think of another, or of exercising such divine virtues as are fitted to that state; nay, we should want the best moral argument for another life, that all good men are not rewarded, nor all bad men punished in this world, which gives a reasonable expectation of another life.

But when we see bad men prosperous as well as the good, and good men suffer as hard things as any bad men do, this convinces us that neither the blessings nor the sufferings of this life are the final rewards or punishments of good or bad men—that God has greater blessings reserved for good men, and greater miseries for the wicked, which is a greater incitement to a divine and heavenly virtue, and a greater restraint to wickedness, than any present rewards or punishments can be. So that this uncertainty of events which some men complain of, and which we can seldom give a reasonable account of when we come to particular cases and particular persons, is so far from being a defect in providence, that it is the wisest method of governing mankind, both considered as a free agent and as an immortal creature, who must live in another world, when he removes out of this.

(3.) This uncertainty of all events, is the trial and exercise of many admirable graces and virtues, which there would be no place for, with respect to this world, were the events and reasons of providence known and certain: such as faith, and hope, and trust, and dependence on God,

which there would be little use of in this world, were all good men immediately rewarded; for they all respect absent, unseen, unknown events. Difficulties and sufferings, which in Scripture are called temptations, are the trials of virtue: when we serve God without any prospect of a present reward; and trust in him, and depend on him, when we are forsaken of all other hopes; when we say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;" or with the prophet Habakkuk, iii. 17, 18: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." And yet if we knew in all cases the particular reasons of providence, and what the end and conclusion of them would be, they would be no trials of our faith and submission to God: the faith and patience of Job was wonderful, but the greatest difficulty in all he suffered was, that he could not possibly understand what God meant and intended, in bringing all those calamities on him; but had he known that this was only a trial of his patience and virtue, and that God would reward these sufferings with a very long and prosperous life, with a new increase of children, and new additions of riches and honour, this had been no difficulty, no trial, any more than the smart of his present sufferings; but Job knew nothing of all this, and therefore did great glory to God, and made himself an admirable example of faith and patience to the world; and God made him as great an example of the rewards of faith and patience. Were the events of providence as constant, regular, and certain, and the reasons of all events as known and visible as some men would have them, and complain that they are not, there would be no exercise of some of the greatest virtues of the Christian life, which do most honour to God, and are the greatest ornaments and perfections of human nature: which evidently proves, that the uncertainty and obscurity of the events of providence, that we know not what shall be, nor in many cases the reasons of what we see, is necessary to the wise government

of mankind, and therefore is no defect, but the beauty and perfection of Providence.

4. We are necessarily ignorant of a great many things, without the knowledge of which, it is impossible for us to understand the reasons of providence; and therefore we ought no more to complain that we are ignorant of the reasons of providence, than we do of our ignorance of other matters, without the knowledge of which, the reasons of providence cannot be known; as to name some few of them:

(1.) We are very ignorant of men, as I observed before: we know not their hearts, and thoughts, and counsels, we see little of their private conversation, we cannot look into their closets and secret retirements; and unless we knew better what men are, it is impossible we should understand the reasons of God's providence towards them. Now though, as to external appearances, there is some truth in this objection, that bad men are oftentimes very prosperous, and good men afflicted in this world; yet I doubt not but when this objection is applied to the prosperity or affliction of particular men, where it is once applied right, it is a hundred times applied wrong; especially as to the sufferings of good men; for we very often take those for good men, who are not so, and who many times pluck off their disguise themselves, and convince the world that they are not so; and yet if any misfortune or adversity befall such men before they are known, we are apt to wonder that God should afflict such good men as they are, and think it a great difficulty in providence; when they themselves know that they deserve all that they suffer, and a great deal more.

Nay, I believe there is not a good man in the world who knows himself, and impartially observes his own thoughts, and passions, and actions, but knows a reason why God at any time afflicts him; how he has deserved it, and how he wants it, and can justify the greatest severities of providence towards himself: I am sure all the good men in Scripture do so, excepting Job; they frequently confess and bewail their sins, and acknowledge the justice and mercy of God in what they suffer; and as for Job, all that he insists on, is to justify his own uprightness and integrity; that he was no secret hypocrite, as his friends un-

charitably accused him; that he knew nothing so bad of himself as to deserve such amazing sufferings as God had brought on him: and, indeed, Job's case was very peculiar; and it appeared, in the conclusion, that God did not punish him for some unknown wickedness, but to exercise his faith and patience, and to make him a glorious and triumphant example of a firm adherence to God under the severest trials.

Now when there is no good man in the world, who upon his own account can charge God with afflicting him beyond what his sins deserve, or the state of his soul requires, we have reason to think that there is very little truth in this objection; that did we know other good men as well as we know ourselves, we should as well understand the reason why God afflicts them, as why he afflicts us; and if there be a wise and just reason for the sufferings of good men, whatever their sufferings are, they can be no objection against providence.

And it is very often seen that some men are thought wicked as wrongfully and ignorantly as others are thought good. It is a very little matter that will give men a bad character in a censorious world; a different opinion in religion or some external modes of worship; nay, different interests and state factions; nay, some private quarrels and animosities will make some men paint each other as black as hell can make them, and then quarrel with Heaven if it do not revenge their quarrels and execute that vengeance which they doom each other to.

And as for others, who with more reason are thought bad men, as guilty of known immoralities, yet they may have a great deal of good in them, many generous qualities and social virtues, which may make them very useful men in a commonwealth; and they may do so much good as in the opinion of mankind may deserve some temporal rewards, as may deserve public trusts and public honours: and it is very hard to reproach Providence with the prosperity of such men, which we ourselves think well bestowed, notwithstanding their other vices. And other bad men may have some secret and latent principles of virtue which deserve to be cherished, and when this is God alone knows;

but if we knew it, we should have no reason to quarrel with the kindness and patience of God to such men, which is intended to lead them to repentance. And as for profligate sinners, who are at open defiance with God, it is seldom seen but that some remarkable vengeance at one time or other overtakes them, and vindicates the justice of providence in their confusion. So easy were it to justify the providence of God, both towards good and bad men, did we sufficiently know men. And our ignorance of men makes it a very foolish and absurd objection; for if instead of answering it we should deny the truth of the objection, they have no way to prove it. Should we assert that all good men are rewarded, and all bad men punished, who deserve to be rewarded or punished in this world, they have no way to disprove this but by plain matter of fact; by showing some good men afflicted who deserve a reward, and some bad men prosperous who deserve to be punished. Now this they can never do without pretending to know what is in man, to see their inside, to be acquainted with all their secrets: in a word, to know men as God knows them. For though some men are afflicted whom we think good men, and it may be are so, and some bad men are prosperous, yet there may be such a mixture of evil and good in these good and bad men, which we cannot see, as may make it very wise and just in God to afflict these good men, and to prosper the wicked; and since we cannot possibly know these things, it becomes us to be very modest in censuring providence.

(2.) We are in most cases very ignorant also of the counsels and designs of Providence; we seldom know in any measure what God is doing in the world, and then it is impossible for us to understand the admirable wisdom of all those intermediate events, which tend to unknown ends. In the best contrived plot there will always be some scenes full of nothing but mystery and confusion till the end explains them, and then we admire the skill and art of the poet.

Now the great obscurities and difficulties of providence are in such intermediate events, before we know what God intends by them. As to give an instance or two of it.

Had we heard no more of Joseph but that he was sold by his brethren into Egypt, and there falsely accused by a wanton mistress and cast into prison, we should have thought that God had dealt very hardly with him; but when we understand that all this was the way to Pharaoh's throne, there is no man but would be contented to be a Joseph.

Thus the story of Job's afflictions strike terror and astonishment into all that hear them. Job himself knew not what account to give of his sufferings, and his friends gave a very bad one, by falsely and uncharitably accusing Job of some unknown wickedness, to vindicate God's severity towards him; and we should have been as much puzzled with it to this day, had we not been acquainted with the reason of Job's sufferings, and with that long and great prosperity wherewith God rewarded his faith and patience; and now no man thinks the sufferings of Job any difficulty in providence, much less any objection against it.

Thus it is with reference to single men, when we see only a scene or two of their lives, we may meet with such prosperous or adverse events as we cannot account for; but could we see from the beginning to the end, in most cases the Divine providence would justify itself.

But then the hidden and mysterious designs of Providence relating to churches and kingdoms which comprehend so many great and wonderful revolutions; the translations of empires; the removing the gospel from one country, and planting churches in others where there were none before; the increase and flourishing state of religion in one age, and its great declension and almost total eclipse in another; those surprising changes which may be observed in the genius, tempers, and inclinations of princes and people in several ages; the unaccountable beginnings of war, and the as unaccountable successes, and unaccountable end of it; the long prosperity of persecuting tyrants, and their sudden fall: these, and such like events, must needs be very obscure and unknown to us, who know not what God aims at in all this, nor what designs he is carrying on.

The designs of Providence many times reach from one age to another; nay, do not come to perfection in many

ages; and yet have all a mutual dependence and relation to each other, and are subservient to some last great end. The prophecies of Daniel, and the revelations of St. John, as mysterious books as they are, and as difficult as it is to apply the several parts of them to their particular events, yet this much is plain in them, that there is a long series and chain of events which reach from age to age, with infinite turnings and variety of wisdom, directed by a steady and unerring counsel to some unknown but glorious conclusion. And when the divine counsels are so deep and mysterious and so far out of our sight—when we see so little a part of what God does, and know not what end God aims at in it, how impossible is it that we should understand the reason of particular events? Had we a certain and particular history of what God has already done, and could we certainly understand the prophecies of what is still to be done in every age and in all succeeding ages; that we could have one view of providence from beginning to the end, we should be more competent judges of the wisdom, beauty, and justice of providence. But when our accounts of what is past are so imperfect and uncertain, and our knowledge of what is to come much more imperfect than of what is past—when we know so little of our own age, of our own country, of our own neighbourhood, it is as impossible to understand the reasons of providence, as it is to understand the wise contrivance and design of a comedy by reading one act, or it may be but one scene of that act.

This is certain, that we can never understand the reasons of providence without understanding the counsels of God, and for what end every thing is designed. For every thing is well or ill contrived as it serves the end for which it is intended; and therefore we may as reasonably pretend to understand all the secret counsels of God, as all the reasons of providence. This very reason St. Paul gives why the providence of God is so unsearchable, Rom. xi. 33, 34: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! for who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"

(3.) We are very ignorant also of the state of the

other world, and while we are so, it is impossible that we should be able thoroughly to comprehend the reason of God's providence in this world.

It is a vain thing to talk of providence without taking the other world into the account. Were there no other life after this, it were not worth the while to dispute whether there be a providence or not; for whether there be or be not a providence, things are as they are; and if death put an end to us, it is of no great consequence which is truest. The only reason why some men so zealously dispute against a providence, is because they are unwilling to believe there is a God or another world; and the reason why we so zealously contend for a providence, is to support ourselves against all cross events, with the care and protection of a wise and good God at present, and with the hopes of a more blessed and happy life hereafter. So that in truth this dispute is not intended so much against providence, as against the being of God and another life; and therefore both these must be taken into the account when they make their objections against providence, or all their arguments signify nothing. As for instance—

It is enough for them to say, and to prove too, that there are such difficulties of providence (for the difficulties of providence are their great objection) as no man can give a reasonable account of, but that there are such difficulties as infinite wisdom itself cannot account for; for though there may be many difficulties which we cannot particularly answer, (as all wise men acknowledge that there are,) yet unless they can positively prove that infinite wisdom itself cannot answer these difficulties, the world may still be governed by an infinitely wise Being; and it is demonstrable that they can never prove this; for nothing less than infinite wisdom can tell what infinite wisdom knows, and what difficulties it can answer; which shows how vain all these arguments against providence are, which at last resolve themselves into the ignorance of human understandings, that there is no providence, because we see such things done in the world whi .h, for aught we know, infinite wisdom can give very wise reasons for, but we cannot.

Thus to come to the business in hand: It is not enough

to prove that there are such difficulties in providence as we can give no account of, if there be no other life after this; but they must positively prove that there are such difficulties as the next world can give no account of.

All men must acknowledge this to be very reasonable; for if there be another life after this, it is evident that the reasons of providence must in many cases be wholly fetched from the other world. If we must live in another world when we remove out of this, then this life is but one short scene of providence, and the government of mankind in this world is chiefly in order to the next; and then the reasons of God's government also must relate to the next world: and if we must judge of the providence of God by its relation to the next world, it will give a general answer to all difficulties of providence, and give us satisfactory reasons why we must not expect to understand all the particular passages of providence in this world.

The general answer is this, that all the seeming irregularities of providence in this world, will be rectified in the next; and when we see this done, we shall then see the wisdom of what we now call the irregular and eccentric motions of providence. It is certain this may be so, and no man can prove it cannot be so; and if we had no other evidence for it, the reason and nature of things, upon the supposition of the other world, make it highly probable that it will be so.

All men who believe another world, believe also that good men shall be greatly rewarded, and the wicked punished in the next life; and we Christians are assured that it shall be so, by the express revelations of Scripture; that good men shall be eternally rewarded in heaven, and bad men eternally punished in hell-fire: and it is wonderful to me, that any Christians who profess to believe this, should puzzle themselves about the difficulties of providence; for what difficulties are there, which eternal happiness and eternal miseries will not answer?

The great prosperity of bad men, especially when they openly defy God and religion, and oppress all within their power, and persecute the true disciples of Christ, and do all the mischief they can in the world; and the poverty and

disgrace, persecutions and sufferings of good men, are thought great difficulties in providence; but could these objectors but look into the next world, and see Dives tormented in flames, and hear him beg only for a drop of water to cool his tongue; could they see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, no longer begging an alms, but entertained with all the delights of Paradise: could they see the punishments of tyrants, persecutors, and oppressors, and the glorious crowns of martyrs, would they then any longer complain of providence? Would they think God too kind to bad men, or too hard and severe to the good?

If the final rewards and punishments of good and bad men are reserved for the next world, there is no difficulty at all in the prosperity of some bad men, and the afflictions of the good in this world; for they are not intended so much for rewards and punishments, as for methods of discipline and government; that the justice of God is not so much concerned in it, as the wisdom of providence; which we who know not what belongs to the government of the world, are very unfit judges of. This leaves room for God, as his own infinite wisdom shall direct, to exercise great patience and long-suffering towards bad men, to make them the ministers and executioners of his vengeance upon a wicked world, or to lead them to repentance; and to correct the sins and follies of good men, to rectify the temper of their minds, to govern their passions, to exercise and improve their graces and virtues; in a word, to make bad men good, and to make good men better; and to serve the wise ends of his government and providence by both.

So that the belief of another world gives a general answer to all the difficulties of providence; and it does not become a Christian to call any thing a difficulty in providence, which the other world will answer. That there are such difficulties as we can give no account of without another life, we all acknowledge, and know that it must be so; for if this life have a relation to the next, the reasons of providence in many cases must of necessity be fetched from the next world; and therefore when an atheist disputes with a Christian against providence, if he will say any thing to the purpose, he must dispute against providence, upon the suppo

sition of another life, and prove that the eternal rewards and punishments of the next world cannot vindicate the wisdom and justice of providence in this. This is the true state of the controversy; and bring them to this issue, and they will find little to say, which will give any trouble to a wise man to answer.

But after all, we must confess, that we know so little of the other world, that it is impossible for us to give a particular reason of every passage of providence, which relates to the next world.

I say, which relates to the next world, which are the greatest difficulties of all good men. The belief of another life will answer all the difficulties of providence which concern this life; but those difficulties which concern the state of the other world, it cannot answer; but then there is a plain reason why we cannot answer such difficulties, viz. because we do not know enough of the state of the other world, to say any thing to them, and therefore we ought not to trouble ourselves about them here, but to stay till we come into the next world, and then it is very probable they will be no difficulties.

I shall instance in one very great one, and that is the state of religion in this world; which is no objection against providence with respect to this life, but the whole difficulty of it relates to the next life. That since all men have immortal souls, and must be happy or miserable for ever, God should for so many ages suffer the whole world, excepting the Jews, to live in ignorance and in Pagan idolatry and superstition; that Christ came so late into the world to reveal the true God and to publish the gospel to them; and that so great a part of the world still are Pagans and Mohammedans; nay, that so little a part of the Christian world retains the true faith and worship of Christ: this is ten thousand times a greater difficulty than any present evils and calamities, because the consequences of it reach to eternity.

But then the whole difficulty is no more than this, that we know not what the condition of such men is in the other world, who lived in invincible ignorance of the true God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ in this; this we confess we do not know, but believe so well of God, that we are

verily persuaded, could we see what their state is in the other world, we should see no reason to quarrel with the justice or goodness of God upon their account. And have we any reason then to quarrel with God, only because we know not how he deals with the ignorant heathens in the next world? If we knew how God dealt with these men, and knew that he dealt hardly by them, as far as we could judge this would be a difficulty: but what difficulty is there in knowing nothing of the matter? for if we know nothing of it, we ought to say and judge nothing of it. Men must be very much inclined to quarrel with God, who will raise objections from what they confess they know nothing of; and yet I cannot guess how they should know any thing of the state of ignorant heathens in the next world, since the Scripture says nothing of it; and yet this can be known only by revelation, for we cannot look into the other world.

The plain truth of the case is this. Some men, without any authority of Scripture, confidently affirm that the ignorant heathens shall suffer the same condemnation which Christ has threatened against wilful infidels and wicked Christians; and then it may well be thought a great difficulty, that God should as severely punish men for not knowing Christ when he was never preached to them, and they had no other possible way of knowing him, as he will punish those who have had the gospel of Christ preached to them, but refused to believe in him, or have professed the faith of Christ, but lived very wickedly. This, I confess, is a great difficulty, but it is a difficulty of their own making; and I should think it much more safe for ourselves, and much more honourable for God, to confess our ignorance of such matters, as we have no possible way to know, and to refer all such unknown cases to the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God, than to pretend to know what we cannot know, and from thence to raise such objections as we cannot answer.

Whatever difficulties immediately relate to the state of the other world, we must be contented should remain difficulties till we go thither; for we know so little in particular about the other world, that it is impossible we should be able either to satisfy ourselves or others in such matters·

but these are not properly difficulties in providence, for they do not so much concern the government of this world, as of the next.

Thus I have at large shown not only that the absolute power of God makes him unaccountable, as the sovereign Lord of the world, but that his infinite wisdom is above the comprehension of our narrow understandings: he is not bound to give an account of all the wise designs of his providence, and we are not capable of receiving it.

This indeed is so plain, at the first hearing, to all men who believe God to be infinitely wise, and are sensible of their own ignorance, that I should have been ashamed to have insisted so long on it, did not all men know, who know any thing of this dispute, that most of the objections against providence are owing wholly to this cause, that men will not allow God to do what they cannot understand: and the best way I could take to teach these men more modesty in censuring providence, was to show them particularly that if God govern the world wisely, there are a thousand things which they must of necessity be ignorant of, and then it can be no objection against the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God in governing the world, that they cannot in many cases give a satisfactory account of the particular reasons of providence.

5. Let us now inquire in what cases this is a reasonable answer to all the difficulties of providence, that God "giveth no account of his matters;" that "the judgments of God are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out." And there is great reason for this inquiry, that no man may presume to attribute any thing to God which can never be reconciled with the common notions of good and evil, just and unjust, upon this pretence that the ways and judgments of God are unsearchable and unaccountable, and that we ought not to demand a reason of them.

That there are such men in the world, is sufficiently known to those who understand any thing of some modern controversies in religion. I need instance at present only in the doctrine of eternal and absolute election and reprobation, on which a great many other such like unaccountable doctrines depend—that God created the far greatest

part of mankind on purpose to make them eternally miserable; or at least, as others state it, that he ordered and decreed, or which is the same thing, effectually permitted the sin and fall of Adam, that he might glorify his mercy in choosing some few out of the corrupted mass of mankind to be vessels of glory, and glorify his justice in the eternal punishment of all others, even of reprobated infants, as involved in the guilt of Adam's sin. Now thus far, I confess, they are in the right, that these are very unaccountable doctrines; for to make creatures on purpose to make them miserable, is contrary to all the notions we have of just and good.

But though we readily confess that the ways and judgments of God are unsearchable, yet men must not think, upon this pretence, to attribute what they please to God, how absurd, unreasonable, unjust soever it be, and then shelter themselves against all objections by resolving all into the unaccountable will and pleasure of God; for God has no such unaccountable will as this is, to do such things as manifestly contradict all the notions which mankind have of good and evil.

We find in Scripture that God abhors all such imputations as these, as infinitely injurious to him, and appeals to the common notions of what is just and equal to justify the general rules of his providence. The whole 18th chapter of Ezekiel is a plain proof of this, where God complains of that proverb as reflecting upon the justice and equity of his providence—"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," (ver. 2:) that is, that the children are punished for the sins of their fathers. How unreasonable an imputation this is, God proves from that equal right which he hath in parents and children, which will not admit of such partiality—"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die," (ver. 4:) and declares this to be the general rule of his providence, that a good man who does what is just and right shall surely live; that if he beget a wicked son, his son shall surely die; and if this wicked son beget a just and righteous son, he shall live—"The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father,

neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." (ver. 20.) That if the wicked man turn from his wickedness, he shall live, and if the righteous man turn from his righteousness, he shall die; and appeals to them to judge whether this be not equal—"Yet ye say, the way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?" (ver. 25, 29.)

This plainly proves that all the administrations of Providence are very just and equal, and that to attribute any thing to God which contradicts the common notions of justice and righteousness, is a very great reproach to him, and is thought so by God himself. And therefore when the prophet Jeremiah complained of the prosperity of bad men, as a great difficulty in providence, he lays this down in the first place as an unshaken principle, that God is very just and righteous:—"Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee, yet let me talk of thy judgments: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" Jer. xii. 1.

This very complaint, that there are great difficulties in providence—that the "ways and judgments of God are unsearchable and past finding out," is a plain proof that all mankind expect from God that he should govern the world with great justice and equity; for otherwise, (though such a providence itself would be a great difficulty,) there could be no difficulties in providence, if God were not, by the holiness and justice of his own nature, obliged to observe the eternal and immutable laws of justice and righteousness in governing the world. For upon this supposition, what could the unaccountable difficulties of providence be? Is it that we observe such events as we know not how to reconcile with the common rules of justice? And what then? This is no difficulty, nor unaccountable, if God observes no rules of justice in his government—if he act by such an unaccountable will as has no law or rule—by such a will as regards not what we call right and just, but makes every thing just it wills.

The difficulty and unsearchableness of providence con-

sists not in the rules of providence, but in the events—not in reconciling the rules of providence to the common notions of justice and righteousness, but in reconciling some events to the acknowledged justice and righteousness of God's government. This is the atheists' objection against God's governing the world, because they think that the world is not justly and wisely governed; and though we can vindicate the providence of God, notwithstanding a great many difficult and unaccountable events which the atheists object, yet we can never vindicate the providence of God against unjust and arbitrary rules of government, which the reason of all mankind conclude to be arbitrary and unjust; as for instance—

Though we see good men afflicted, and wicked men prosperous, and it may be can give no particular account why this good man is afflicted and such a wicked man prosperous, yet we can vindicate the wisdom and justice of providence notwithstanding this; and the unsearchable wisdom of God is a good answer to it. But should any man turn this into a rule of providence, that by the sovereign and unaccountable will of God, some good men shall be finally miserable, and some bad men shall be finally happy, this we can never vindicate, because it contradicts the common notions of justice and righteousness. And though we cannot always judge of the righteousness and justice of a particular event, yet we can judge of the rules and abstracted notions of justice and righteousness.

Thus God had often threatened the Jews, that he would visit on them not only their own sins, but the iniquities of their fathers, which in some cases may be very wise and just—of which more hereafter. But when, by an ignorant or spiteful mistake, they turned this into an unjust proverb, which all men acknowledged to be unjust, God declared his abhorrence of it:—"What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?" Ezek. xviii. 2. As if children who had never eaten sour grapes themselves should have their teeth set on edge by their fathers' eating them; that is, that those who had not deserved to be punished for their own sins, should

yet be punished for their fathers' sins. This appears manifestly unjust, and God himself rejects it as a reproach to his providence; and how difficult soever some passages of providence may be, we must own no rules of providence which are manifestly unjust.

Thus it is too certain, that much the greatest part of mankind will be finally miserable; and this is very reconcilable to the justice of God, if the greatest part of mankind are very wicked and deserve to be miserable. But to say that God created the greatest part of mankind, nay, that he created any one man under the absolute decree of reprobation —that he made them to make them miserable, can never be justified by the unaccountable will and pleasure of God, because it is notoriously unjust, if mankind are competent judges of what is just and unjust.

The sum is this: that the providence of God is unsearchable, incomprehensible, unaccountable, is no reason to attribute any thing to God, which, when reduced into abstracted notions and general rules of action, is notoriously unjust. But the true use of it is to reverence the judgments of God, and not to charge any particular events of providence with injustice merely because we do not understand the reasons of them. The general notions and rules of justice are not unaccountable things, for we understand very well what they are; for justice is the same thing in God and men; but the unsearchable wisdom of God can do a great many things wisely and justly, which our narrow minds cannot comprehend the wisdom and justice of. Now this makes infinite wisdom a sufficient reason why we should acquiesce in the wisdom and justice of providence, notwithstanding such events as we cannot understand the reasons of: but an unaccountable will which acts by no rules of justice, as far as we can understand what justice means, can give no reasonable satisfaction to any man; for it is no reason to be satisfied with providence that God does such things by a sovereign and arbitrary will, as the reason of mankind condemns as unjust; for this does not answer our complaints, but justifies them.

This is all the atheist endeavours to prove, and all that he desires should be granted him, to confute the belief of a

God and a providence. That God does such things as we can give no satisfactory account of, does him little service, because the unsearchable wisdom of God answers such difficulties. But if we will grant him that God acts by such rules as all men who judge impartially, according to the natural notions and the natural sense which we have of justice, must think unjust; this is what he would have; and he will give us leave to talk as much as we please of the arbitrary and sovereign will of God, but he will believe no such God, for this is not the natural notion of a God to be arbitrary, but to be good and just; and to say that God is good and just, but not good and just as men understand goodness and justice, is to say that we have no natural notion of the goodness and justice of God, and then we have no natural notion of a God. For if the natural notion of a God is, that he is just and good, it seems hard to think that we should have a natural notion of a just and good God, without having any natural notion what his justice and goodness is. But instead of that should we have such natural notions of justice and goodness as (if we believe what some men say of God) can never be reconciled with his being just and good.

This then must be laid down as a standing rule, that we must never attribute any thing to God, which contradicts the natural notions which we have of justice and goodness, under a pretence that God is unaccountable, and his ways and judgments unsearchable; for it is not the will of God, which is always directed by goodness and justice, that is unaccountable, but his wisdom; not the standing rules of his providence, which are nothing else but perfect and unerring justice and goodness, but the application of particular events to these rules: and having premised this by way of caution, I come now more particularly to consider in what cases this is a reasonable answer to all the difficulties of providence.

(1). Now in the first place I observe in general, that the unsearchableness of the Divine wisdom in governing the world, is a reasonable answer to all difficulties which have no intrinsic or essential evil in them. Whatever we see done in the world, if it be possible to imagine any cases or

circumstances wherein such a thing may be wisely and justly done, we have reason to believe that the infinite wisdom of God had wise and just reasons for doing it, though we know not what they are. For is it not great perverseness to charge God with doing such things unjustly, as it is possible might be done for wise and just reasons? And yet I challenge all the atheists in the world, to name me any one thing which ever God did, that could not possibly, in any cases or circumstances whatsoever, be wisely and justly done.

The difficulties of providence do not consist merely in external events; for all external events may be good or evil, just or unjust, with respect to their different circumstances of time, or place, or person, and the like: and therefore when we see any thing happen, which, as far as we apprehend the case, seems a difficulty in providence, if altering the case would answer the difficulty, it is only supposing that God sees the case to be otherwise than we apprehend it to be, and the difficulty vanishes. And is not this very easy and natural to suppose, that God may know the case better than we do? And is it not much more reasonable to suppose that we mistake the case, than to charge the divine providence with doing any thing hard or unjust?

But to make you sensible of this, I shall explain it a little more particularly. Most of the objections against providence relate to the good or evil that happen to private men, or to public societies, to kingdoms and commonwealths, such as the length or shortness of our lives, health or sickness, poverty or riches, honour or disgrace, famine, sword and pestilence; or on the contrary, blessings of plenty, peace, and a wholesome air, the changes and revolutions of states and empires, the removing kings and setting up kings. Now what of all this is there, that God can never wisely and justly do? May not God have very wise and just reasons for lengthening some men's lives, and for shortening others? for making men rich or poor, honourable or vile? for translating kingdoms and empires? for sending peace or war, plenty or famine? And if all these things can be wisely and justly done, how can the doing of any of these things be an objection against providence? Yes, you will

say, such good or evil events may be wrongly applied to persons who do not deserve them, and then they become unjust; and so you apprehend they many times are, and this is the difficulty of providence. But now if there be no iniquity in the events themselves, when there are wise and just reasons for them, why should we not rather conclude that there are wise reasons for them, when they are ordered and appointed by God? Are not the natural notions we have of the Divine justice, a sufficient reason to believe that God never does any thing but what is just? And is not his unsearchable wisdom, which sees such things as we cannot see, a sufficient reason to confess that God may have wise and just reasons for what he does, though we know them not? This is enough to satisfy all the friends of providence, and to silence its enemies; for if all those events which they think hard or unjust may be very wise and just, as the natural justice of God is reason to believe they are, and as the unsearchable wisdom of God proves they may be, though we do not see the wisdom and justice of them—then it is certain that what may be wise and just can be no argument against the wisdom and justice of providence. And when we have so many reasons to believe a providence, such a *may be* is a reasonable answer to all such difficulties as are themselves no more than *may be's*.

(2.) The unsearchable wisdom of God is a reasonable satisfaction as to all prerogative acts, which we must seek for no other reason of but the good will and pleasure of God. I call those prerogative acts which are the exercise of a free and sovereign will, within the bounds of just and good. The divine nature, infinite as it is, confines itself within the bounds of justice and goodness; and the prerogative of God, as the absolute and sovereign Lord, cannot transgress these bounds. But there are a great many acts of sovereignty, relating to the free exercise of justice and goodness, which are under the necessary direction of no law, but are only the free and unaccountable choice of a sovereign will: as in Scripture, God is sometimes said to do such things "according to his will, according to the good pleasure of his will, according to his good pleasure;" which always relates to such prerogative acts, and signifies to us, that we must

seek no farther for the reasons of such things than the sovereign will of God; as a sovereign prince, while he keeps within the legal exercise of his prerogative, needs give no other account of it, but that it is his will and pleasure.

But there are some men who will not be so civil to God as they are to a sovereign prince, to take his sole will and good pleasure for a satisfactory reason of any thing; but quarrel about these prerogative acts, and ask a great many foolish questions, and make a great many impertinent objections, even against the exercise of a free and sovereign goodness.

Now in truth this is to deny God the rights of a sovereign, to demand a reason of him beyond his own will for the acts of pure sovereignty. But yet I will grant these men, that though in all such cases we must ask no other reason but the mere will of God, yet God never does any thing for mere will and pleasure, in the sense that some men do, but has always wise and hidden reasons, which we cannot comprehend. And though they will not allow the unsearchable wisdom of God a just satisfaction to other objections, yet methinks where they ought to demand no other reason but the will of God, it should abundantly satisfy them to know, that though this will of God is sovereign and unaccountable, it is always guided by infinite and infallible wisdom.

That you may the better understand this, I shall give you some instances of it, in the prerogative acts of goodness and justice. Goodness indeed is essential to the notion of a God; but yet there are some sovereign acts of goodness which no creature could challenge from God, which God might not have done, and yet have been very good; and why God exercises such free and prerogative acts of goodness, must be resolved wholly into the good pleasure of his own will. This is the account the Scripture gives us, of that mysterious goodness in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, which is therefore everywhere in Scripture called "grace," and "free grace," and "the love of God," and "the will of God;" as Christ tells that "he came not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him." And the whole economy of our redemption is called "the purpose of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will." And thus is

every part of our redemption, as our new birth—"of his own will he hath begotten us." The gifts of the Holy Ghost were bestowed upon the apostles "according to his own will;" Heb. ii. 4. "God worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure;" Phil. ii. 13. All which signifies no more but this, that these are such prerogative acts of goodness, as we must seek for no other reason of, but the sovereign will and good pleasure of God.

Now in such sovereign acts of goodness as these, the time, and manner, and other circumstances, and the rules and methods of administration, are all perfectly free and voluntary, where God has not bound up himself by covenant and promise; and therefore we must satisfy ourselves that God has very wise reasons for what he does, but must not critically examine whether every thing be done in the best manner that we can think of, which would put an end to a great many foolish inquiries, with which men perplex themselves and disparage the mysteries of our salvation; as, why God sent Christ into the world for the salvation of mankind? whether there were no other possible way to save sinners, or whether this were absolutely the best? why God sent Christ so late into the world, in the last days, when it grew near its end, and so many generations of men had perished in ignorance and wickedness, before his appearance? why so great a part of the world to this day has never heard of Christ? and a great many other such like questions as these, to all which it is sufficient to reply, that our redemption by Christ is an act of sovereign grace, and therefore we must inquire no farther than the will of God. Had God never sent Christ into the world, nor preached the gospel to any one nation, we should have had no reason to complain; for he did not owe such a Saviour to sinners: and therefore we have less reason to complain of the time of his coming into the world, and that his gospel is not universally received by mankind. Sovereign grace is free and unaccountable, and we need not doubt but that such a stupendous goodness is administered by as unsearchable wisdom; and it is reasonable for us to acquiesce in the belief of God's unerring wisdom, especially in such cases where we have no right to inquire beyond his will. When we receive all from God

without his owing us any thing, it is a good answer St. Paul gives—"Who hath first given unto him, and it shall be recompensed to him again; for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen." Rom. xi. 35, 36.

Thus the divine justice requires, that God should punish obstinate and incorrigible sinners; but then he executes justice with a free and sovereign authority, that is, he is not confined to time, and place, and manner of punishing sinners, as the inferior ministers of justice are; but when men have made themselves "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction," then God may punish sooner or later, publicly or privately, and in what manner he pleases, without giving any other reason for it but his own will. God has more reason of punishing sinners in this world, than merely to take vengeance of their sins, and therefore he punishes them in such a manner as may best serve the ends of his providence, as may most advance his own name and glory, and do most good in the world. Thus God tells Pharaoh, "for this cause have I raised thee up;" that is, either advanced thee to the throne, or preserved thy life thus long in the midst of all the plagues I have brought upon thy land, "for to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth;" (Exod. ix. 16:) that is, to take such a remarkable vengeance on thee, as may make all the earth confess my glory.

Would men but allow God the authority of a sovereign, who can spare and reprieve, nay, pardon in this world, without the imputation of injustice, it would answer all the cavilling objections against providence, which relate to the punishments of bad men. God might then be allowed to execute speedy vengeance upon some sinners, and to delay the punishment of others, and to suffer them to be prosperous for a great while, without giving any other reason for it than his own will and pleasure. God hath always wise reasons for these things, though we do not always know them; but if the sovereignty of God will justify all this without any other reason, much more ought we to be satisfied with what God does, when we know that he executes

judgment, and restrains and punishes wickedness, and governs bad men with unsearchable wisdom.

3. That the ways of God are unsearchable, is a reasonable answer to all difficulties which concern such matters as we must confess to be above our understanding. I have already given you a great many instances of this nature, which I need not repeat; and indeed he must be a very ignorant man, who is not sensible that there is a knowledge which is too wonderful for him, which the light of nature cannot discover, and which God has not thought fit to reveal. And is it not reasonable in all such cases to say, that the ways and judgments of God are above our knowledge, and to be contented to be ignorant of what we cannot know? This, I am sure, is the only remedy that is left us, and the only way to rid our minds of such perplexing difficulties as are owing to our own unavoidable ignorance of things.

This is sufficient to show you, that the providence of God, not only as our absolute Lord, but as the infinitely wise governor of the world, is and must be unaccountable, and that this is a very reasonable answer to the difficulties of providence; and the true use of all is, not to strive with God, not to quarrel at his providence, but to reverence his unsearchable judgments—to bear whatever he lays on us, with patience and submission, and to compose our minds to a firm trust and dependence on him, in the most cross and threatening events.

It is thought a great piece of wit to be able to start some new objections against providence, and to find a great many faults in God's government of the world. But besides the great irreverence to God, did such men believe a God, it is a certain proof of the most despicable ignorance, that they are ignorant to such a degree as not to know they are ignorant: for if they did, they would not dare to judge and censure infinite wisdom.

CHAPTER V.

THE JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS OF PROVIDENCE.

The next inquiry is, concerning the justice of the Divine providence. Justice and righteousness are essential to the notion of a God, and therefore if God govern the world, he must govern it righteously; and this is the great and formidable objection against providence, that the world is not governed with justice and righteousness: and could this be evidently and convincingly proved, I would allow the conclusion, that then God does not govern the world. But I challenge any man who understands what the justice of God's government is, to charge the Divine providence with any one plain and notorious act of injustice; for the truth is, the ground of all these objections is an ignorance of the nature of God's government and of the justice of providence; and when this is truly stated, all such objections will need no answer.

Justice is commonly divided into commutative and distributive justice; the first respects men's rights and properties, the second their deserts; the first consists in giving every man what is his own by some natural or acquired rights; the second consists in rewarding or punishing men, as the nature and quality of their actions deserve. And upon both these accounts, some men impeach the Divine providence.

First, Because it is too manifest that there is a great deal of injustice done in the world; that a great many men are deprived of their rights and properties by fraud, injustice or open violence; and therefore the world is not justly and righteously governed; which they think in the last issue must reflect upon the justice and righteousness of providence; if God be the supreme and sovereign Lord of the world.

Secondly, That rewards and punishments are not justly and equally distributed; that some bad men are greatly rewarded, and some good men greatly punished; which is

not reconcilable with the distributive justice of providence. Now the plainest and shortest way of answering these and all such-like objections, is to consider wherein the justice of providence consists, and what justice requires of God in the government of this lower world: for if God may govern the world very righteously, without doing what some men think justice requires him to do, and without hindering what they think justice requires him to hinder, this is a sufficient vindication of the justice of providence, whatever other objections they may make against it: and I shall state this as plainly and briefly as I can.

1. First, then, I suppose I may take it for granted, that the justice of providence does not consist in hindering all acts of injustice and violence. There may be great violence and injustice committed in the world, and yet God may govern the world with great righteousness: which is no more than to say, that men may be very wicked and unjust, and yet God be very just. As for God's permitting so much evil to be committed, that is a greater objection against the holiness than against the justice of providence, and shall be particularly considered under that head; but the justice of providence does not consist in hindering men from sinning, but in punishing them when they do. Were it unjust in God to suffer men to do any injustice, it would be but a very imperfect kind of justice to punish them for it; for upon this supposition, the justice of punishing sin would be founded in the injustice of permitting it; and God must be first unjust in permitting injustice, before he can be just in punishing it. Which shows how absurd it would be, to charge the providence of God with injustice, because there are so many unjust men, who do many unjust things.

2. For God may do that very justly, which men cannot do without great injustice; and therefore men may be very unjust and God very just: as for instance; God may very justly take away any man's estate, when no man can do it without injustice; and the case is the same with respect to honour and power, and life itself; for God is the supreme Lord and Proprietor of the world; we are all his, and all that we have is his; we have a right to our lives and liberties, estates, honours, and power, against all human claims;

but we have no right against God; he may give riches, and honours, and power, to whom he pleases, and take them away again when he sees fit, without being chargeable with any injustice; for what he gives and what he takes away, are his own; and "may not he do what he will with his own?"

There can be no commutative justice in a strict and proper sense, where there is no right but on one side; for he who has no right can suffer no wrong; and he in whom the whole right is, can do no wrong in giving or taking away what is his own: and therefore legal rights and properties, which are the foundation of commutative justice, can be no objection against providence, for no creature has any legal property against God. The justice of providence does not relate to the rights of creatures, but to the moral and eternal reasons of things; it does not consist in defending every man in his legal rights, which is the justice of human governments, but in rewarding or punishing men according as they deserve, or as may best serve the wise ends of God's government in this world.

There seems to me to be no occasion for that dispute *de jure Dei in creaturas*, "*what right God has in creatures;*" for there is no doubt but God has an absolute, unlimited, uncontrollable right in all his creatures; they and all they have are his, and at his absolute disposal: though it does not hence follow, that God may without any injustice make creatures on purpose to make them miserable: for though creatures have no natural rights against God, yet the justice and goodness of the Divine nature give them a moral right to such usage as they shall deserve: as, for instance, that an innocent creature should not be miserable, and that those who deserve well should not be ill used. But these moral rights concern distributive justice, and result from the goodness and justice of the divine nature and government, not from the natural rights of creatures. We are absolutely at the will and disposal of God, as slaves and vassals are at the will of their lord; but our security is, that God can will nothing but what is wise, and just, and good.

3. From hence it evidently follows, that in our disputes about the justice of providence, we must confine our inquiries to distributive justice; that is, we must not barely consider

what men have, or what they lose, or what they suffer, nor what the immediate and visible causes of all this are, whether just or unjust; but we must consider what proportion there is between their condition and their moral deserts; or whether they enjoy or suffer any thing which will not serve the wise and just ends of God's government. If men are put into such a condition as they have neither deserved nor can make any good use of, or which does not make them instruments of the divine providence to serve some wise and good ends, by what means soever they come into such a condition, it reflects upon the wisdom and justice of God, who has the supreme disposal of all events, and by a sovereign authority allots all men their several portions and stations in the world: but let men's condition be what it will, whether they be rich or poor, happy or miserable, advanced or ruined by injustice, oppression, and violence, if this be what they deserved, what they are fit for, what the wise government of the world requires, it can be no blemish to providence, which directs and governs all things with wisdom and justice.

So that it is no objection against the justice of providence to say that there are a great many miserable people in the world, and a great deal of injustice daily committed in it; unless you can prove that any of these miserable people ought not, for wise and just reasons, to suffer such miseries; or that any suffer by injustice what they ought not to suffer: for if, notwithstanding all the miseries that are in the world, and all the wickedness that is committed in it, no man suffers any thing but what he deserves, or what God may wisely and justly inflict on him, this abundantly vindicates the wisdom and justice of providence.

4. But for the better understanding of this, we must consider more particularly the nature of God's justice and what acts of justice the government of this world requires, and how it differs from the justice of human governments; the confounding of which has occasioned most of the objections against the justice of providence.

(1.) To consider the nature and exercise of God's justice: for though the general notion of justice be the same, whether we speak of the justice of God or men, yet the particular

acts of justice vary, as they do even among men, according as their rights and authority differ. Justice signifies to give to every man what is his own, and to take nothing from any man but what is our own; to serve ourselves of other men, and to reward or punish them as their actions deserve, and as our authority will justify: so that the particular expressions of justice and righteousness, as exercised by different persons, differ as much as the circumstances of men's fortune and conditions, relations, authority, and power differ: for when two men do the same thing, it may be done very justly by one, and very unjustly by the other, because one may have a right and authority to do it, and the other have none; as a prince or judge may very justly execute a criminal, and confiscate his estate, which a private man cannot justly do.

Now if the difference between a private man and a magistrate, between a prince and a subject, makes such a vast difference in the particular acts and exercise of justice and righteousness, as they respect such different states; that vast disproportion which is between God and creatures, must make a much greater difference; that though the general notion of justice and righteousness is the same, both with respect to God and men, yet God may do that very justly, which men cannot justly do: as a prince may exercise some acts of justice, which a private man must not do.

I shall at present only instance in God's absolute dominion and sovereignty, and show you in some plain cases what a vast difference this makes between the justice of God and the justice of men. Now God's absolute dominion gives him right and authority to do whatever is consistent with wisdom and goodness; for absolute dominion is absolute authority, and absolute authority makes every thing just which is wise and good. A limited authority has a rule, and must not do what is wise and good, against its rule of right. No man must take away that which is another's, and which he has no authority to take away, whatever wise and good ends he can serve by it. Though it were never so apparent that it would be a great kindness to the man himself to take away great part of his estate, which he uses ill to oppress his neighbours, and to make

himself a beast; though he does not deserve the estate he has, nay, deserves to lose it; though we could bestow it upon men who deserve and would use it better, or could employ it to excellent uses, for the service of God, and of his church, or for the relief of the poor. All these wise and good purposes would justify no man who invades another's rights without a just authority. But had any prince such an absolute authority over the estates of all his subjects, that he could give or take them away as he pleased, then such reasons as these would justify the exercise of such a sovereign will and power in transferring estates and properties, and all men would allow it to be very just and righteous. Now this is the case with respect to God, as I observed before; for he is the sole Lord and proprietor of the world, and therefore no other bounds can be set to the just exercise of his authority but to do what is wise and good. He may give or take away any man's estate, or honour, or power, whenever he can serve any wise, or just, or good ends by it; for they are all but several trusts; we are but God's stewards, and must give an account of our stewardship: and if we do not use our riches and honours well, or when he has no longer any use of us, he has as absolute authority to lay us aside, as a lord has to change his steward when he pleases.

Thus God is the absolute Lord of all men. We are all his creatures, and are in his hands as clay in the hands of the potter, and therefore he may deal with us as he pleases, and may serve the ends of his own glory and providence of us, as far as his own wisdom and goodness will direct. Thus, for instance, we think it very unjust in human governments to punish a virtuous and innocent man, to strip him of his estate or honours, to afflict his body, to expose him to public scorn, and confine him to a noisome prison, and at last to take away his life with exquisite pains and torments. But the sovereign authority of God extends to all this, when he can serve his own glory, and the wise ends of his grace and providence by it, without doing any real injury to his creatures. The wisdom of God requires that there should be very great and excellent reasons for doing this; and the goodness of God requires that such good men should be greatly supported under their suffer-

ings, and greatly rewarded for them; but then the sovereignty of God gives him authority to use the services of his creatures, in doing or suffering his will.

This was the case with Job, whom God exercised with great sufferings, to make him an eminent example of faith and patience. But we know what was the end of Job, and how greatly God rewarded his sufferings; though Job himself, while he was under his sufferings, knew not what other account to give of them, but to resolve all into the sovereign will and pleasure of God. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." And, "Shall we receive good at the hands of God, and shall we not receive evil?" which indeed is answer enough to all such cases, while we have an implicit faith in the wisdom and goodness of Providence.

Thus God dealt with Joseph, made him the instrument of transplanting his father and all his family into Egypt, and rewarded his sufferings by advancing him to Pharaoh's throne.

Nay, thus God dealt with Christ himself, who, as man, was perfect and innocent; "who did no evil, neither was any guile found in his mouth; who went about doing good," and was obedient to his Father's will in all things. And yet him God delivered into the hands of sinners, to suffer an ignominious and painful death, for the redemption of the world. And the sovereignty of God will justify the greatest sufferings of the most innocent men, when they serve such admirable ends, and are so greatly rewarded.

And thus God hath dealt with some of the best men that ever lived in the world. Witness the sufferings of prophets, and of other good men under the old testament, and of the apostles and martyrs of Christ, who have trod in the steps of their Lord, who have suffered with him that they might be glorified together. I know not what the sovereignty of God signifies, if he may not serve the wise ends of his grace and providence, even by the sufferings of his creatures, when such sufferings, how uneasy and grievous soever they are at present, shall turn to their much greater good; when they shall be so greatly rewarded, that good men themselves shall think the reward an abundant recompense for

their sufferings, and glory in those very sufferings which will have so great a reward.

Thus let us consider God as the supreme and absolute judge of the world. Now a sovereign and absolute judge must do that which is just, but he is tied up by no rules or formalities of law, as inferior ministers of justice are; if he reward the good, and punish the wicked, he may do it at what time and in what manner he pleases; he is under no rule but his own sovereign will and wisdom. When men have deserved punishment, he may spare them as long, or execute vengeance on them as soon as he sees fit; for he is the absolute judge of time and place, and other circumstances of executing judgment. This prerogative all sovereign princes challenge, and it is indeed an inseparable right of sovereignty.

So that it is no reasonable objection against the justice of providence, that God does not immediately reward all great and virtuous actions, nor immediately punish wickedness; for a sovereign justice is under no obligation to do this. All that we can expect from divine justice is, that good men shall be rewarded, and the wicked punished; and that whenever God does reward or punish, good men shall have no reason to complain that their reward was delayed; nor bad men to glory in the long delays of punishment; but the greatness of the rewards or punishments shall recompense for all delays, for then God is just in rewarding good men, and punishing the wicked, how long soever he delay either. Sovereign justice is not confined to time; and when the sufferings of good men who deserve a reward, and the prosperity of bad men who deserve punishment, and the delays of both are taken into the account, God is very just and righteous, how long soever he delay to reward or punish.

From what I have now discoursed concerning the sovereignty of the divine justice, you may easily observe that all the objections against the justice of providence, have no other foundation but our ignorance of the nature of God's justice; we measure the justice of providence by the rules of justice among men, without considering that God is the sovereign Lord of the world, and therefore has a right and authority superior to men, and therefore a superior justice too.

It is unjust for men to deprive one another of their just and legal rights, and therefore they think this is a reflection on the justice of providence too, when men suffer wrongfully; but no man has any right against God, who is the sole proprietor of the world; and therefore he may give, and he may take away, he may set up and pull down, and do whatsoever pleaseth him, both in heaven and in earth.

It is unjust for men to afflict and oppress the innocent and virtuous, or to encourage and prosper the wicked; and therefore they complain against providence too, when good men suffer and the wicked are prosperous; but God has an absolute right to the services of all his creatures, both of good and bad men; and if he can serve the wise ends of his grace and providence by the sufferings of good men, or by the prosperity of the wicked; and when he has no farther use of their services, rewards or punishes them according as they deserve; the sovereignty of God will justify the present sufferings of good men and prosperity of the wicked; and their final rewards and punishments will vindicate his justice.

(2.) But for a fuller vindication of the justice of providence, we must consider the nature of God's government of this lower world, and what acts of justice the present government of the world requires. The justice of government must be proportioned to the nature and ends of government: for all acts of justice are not proper at all times, and it is no reproach to the justice of providence, if God do not exercise such acts of justice as are not proper for the present state of the world; for justice is rectitude, and what is not right and fit in such a state of things, is not just.

The great objection against the justice of providence is, that all good men are not rewarded, nor all bad men punished according to their deserts in this world. But this is no objection against the Divine justice to those who believe that there is another world, where all good men shall be rewarded and all wicked men punished; for if all good and bad men shall be finally rewarded and punished according to their works, this is a sufficient vindication of the justice of God.

And as for the justice of providence, though every good

man is not rewarded, nor every bad man punished in this world, this is no reasonable objection if the state of this world will not admit of such a strict and exact justice. Now not to take notice at present of what is commonly said upon this occasion, and what I have formerly discoursed more largely, that this world is not the place of judgment, but a state of trial, probation and discipline, where good men many times suffer, not so much in punishment of their sins, as to exercise their faith and patience, and to brighten their virtues, and to prepare them for greater rewards; and bad men are prosperous, to lead them to repentance, or to make them instruments of the Divine providence in chastising the wickedness of other men, or the more remarkable examples of the Divine justice and vengeance in their final ruin.

I say, not to take notice of these things now, I shall only observe, that the justice of providence is nothing else but the justice of government, which in the nature of the thing must be distinguished from the justice of the final judgment.

Now to govern the world, does not signify to destroy it, but to uphold and preserve it, and to continue a succession of men in it, and to keep it in as good order as the present state of things will admit. The providence of God is that provident care which he takes of all his creatures, while he thinks fit to preserve this present frame of the world; but to destroy the world, is not properly an act of providence, but of judgment; and yet, if we consider the corrupt and degenerate state of the world, did the justice of providence require God to punish all bad men according to their deserts, he must destroy far the greatest part of mankind in every age. This earth would soon be little better than a desolate wilderness, if none but good men were suffered to live in it: but this kind of justice God has renounced ever since the universal deluge. He then indeed exercised such a terrible justice and vengeance, as some men think can be the only proof of a providence; he destroyed the whole world by water, excepting Noah and his sons, whom he preserved in the ark; but he promised that he would never do so again, notwithstanding the great wickedness of mankind,

"The Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth: neither will I again smite any more every living thing as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed time, and harvest, and cold, and heat, and summer, and winter, and day, and night, shall not cease." Gen. viii. 21, 22. So that God will no more destroy the world, nor all the wicked inhabitants of it, till the day of judgment; and then it is certain all wicked men cannot be punished according to their deserts in this world.

The justice of providence then does not consist in rooting all bad men out of the world, or in making them all miserable in it, or in rewarding all good men with temporal felicity; which, considering the present state of the world, cannot be done without constant miracles, and the visible interposition of a Divine power; for when bad men are so much the greater numbers, they will have the greatest share and interest in this world. But the care of providence is to govern bad men, and to protect the good; to restrain and govern the lusts and passions of bad men; to make them the instruments and executioners of his just vengeance on one another; and to make some of them in every age notorious examples of his justice, to keep the world in awe, and to awaken in them a due sense and reverence of the Divine power; and to correct and chastise the miscarriages of good men, and to exercise their graces and virtues. The justice of providence consists in this, not that all good men shall be prosperous in this world, and all bad men miserable, but that notwithstanding all the wickedness that is in the world, the world is kept in tolerable order, and is a tolerable place to live in; and that bad men are as often punished, and good men as often rewarded, as the government of this world requires; that no man suffers any thing but what he deserves, and what God sees good for him, if he will make a wise use of it; and that how prosperous soever bad men are, there are few of them who go out of the world without some marks and tokens of a divine vengeance, though not always so remarkable as to be observed by the world.

The sum is this. God is very just in his government of

the world; but the government of the world does not require the same acts of justice that the final judgment of mankind does. And if we do but consider the nature of the divine justice, which is the justice of a sovereign and absolute Lord, and the difference between the justice of providence and of the final judgment, that is, between God's governing and judging the world, we shall easily answer all the objections against the justice of providence.

This I take to be a full and true account of the justice of providence, and to agree very exactly with the actual administration of providence; for it is manifest that all good men are not rewarded, nor all wicked men punished in this world —that a righteous cause is sometimes oppressed, and that oppression and injustice are very often prosperous; which must needs appear a great difficulty to those who make no difference between the justice of God and men, who think that the justice of providence is as much concerned to defend all men's rights and properties, as the justice of a prince is. This makes them quarrel against providence, when they are hardly and unjustly used by men, and so blinds their minds that they see not the true reasons why God afflicts them, and neither reverence his judgments nor make a wise use of them.

The reasons of this seem very plain. The only question is, how it agrees with that account which the Scripture gives us of God's justice and righteousness? For the righteousness of God is represented in Scripture by loving righteousness, and favouring a righteous cause. Thus Ps. xi. 7:— "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance doth behold the upright." And the Psalmist very often encourages himself to expect the divine favour and protection, from his own innocence and integrity, and the righteousness of his cause. Ps. xxxv. 19:—"Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me; neither let them wink with the eye, that hate me without a cause. Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, even to my cause, my God, and my Lord. Judge me, O God, according to thy righteousness, and let them not rejoice over me. Let them be ashamed and brought to confusion together, that rejoice at my hurt. Let them be clothed with

shame and dishonour, that magnify themselves against me. Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause; yea, let them say continually, Let the Lord be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant." v. 23, 24, 26, 27: "The Lord shall judge the people: judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me. Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just; for the righteous Lord trieth the heart and reins. God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready." And concludes: "I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness, and will sing praises to the name of the Lord most high." Ps. vii. 8, &c. Where the righteousness of the Lord, for which the Psalmist praises him, is his judging and defending a righteous cause. Thus in Ps. ix. 8, 9, 10:—"He shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness. The Lord also will be a refuge to the oppressed, a refuge in time of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." It were easy to multiply texts to this purpose, where God is expressly declared to be an irreconcilable enemy to all injustice and violence, the protector of the widow, the fatherless and oppressed, and of all just and righteous men. But those conclude a great deal too much, who would prove from such texts as these, that no righteous man nor righteous cause shall ever be oppressed; that good men shall always be prosperous, and the wicked always miserable: for it is evident that this was not the state of the world when these Psalms were penned, and therefore this could not possibly be the meaning of them.

How many complaints does the Psalmist make against his enemies, those who were wrongfully his enemies? Ps. lxix. 4. "That his enemies were lively and strong; and they that hated him wrongfully were multiplied." Ps. xxxviii. 19. How passionately does he pray for protection against his enemies! "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord, for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? how long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in

my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Ps. xiii. 1, 2. The thirty-seventh Psalm is a plain proof, that wicked men were very prosperous in those days, though they are threatened with final destruction. And to the same purpose the seventy-third Psalm gives us a large description of the prosperity and pride of bad men, many of whom spend their lives and end their days prosperously: "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked; for there are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued as other men. Behold these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world, they increase in riches." The prosperity of bad men, and the miseries and afflictions of the good, were in those days a great difficulty in providence, and were so to the Psalmist himself; and therefore it is certain that whatever he says of the righteousness of God, and his care of righteous men, and his abhorrence of all wickedness and injustice, cannot signify that God will always defend men in their just rights; that he will always prosper a righteous cause and righteous men; for this was against plain matter of fact, and we cannot suppose the Psalmist so inconsistent with himself, as in the same breath to complain that wicked men were prosperous and good men afflicted, and to affirm that the just and righteous Judge of the world would always punish unjust oppressors, and protect the innocent. Nay, indeed, the very nature of the thing proves the contrary; for there can be no unjust oppressors, if nobody can be oppressed in their just rights; and therefore it is certain the Divine providence does, at least for a time, suffer some men to be very prosperous in their oppressions, and does not always defend a just and innocent cause; for if he did, there could be no innocent oppressed man to be relieved, nor any oppressor to be punished. And if it be consistent with the justice and righteousness of providence to permit such things for some time, we must conclude that it is at the discretion of providence, how long good men shall be oppressed, and the oppressor go unpunished.

The plain account then of this matter, as it is represented in Scripture, is this·

1. That as God is infinitely just and righteous himself, so he loves justice and righteousness among men: he loves righteousness and righteous men, and hates all injustice, violence and injuries; for the righteous Lord must love righteousness and hate iniquity; and therefore, though the Divine justice is superior to all human rights, and his authority absolute and sovereign, to dispose of all his creatures and of all they have, as his own wisdom directs, yet men cannot invade each other's rights without injustice; and when rights and properties are settled by human laws, it is the rule of righteousness to us, to give to every man that which is his own; and it is the justice of government to punish those who invade another's rights; and this is that justice which the righteous Lord loves in men, and the violation of which he hates.

So that the justice of the Divine nature makes God love righteousness and justice, and hate all injustice and oppression; and the justice of providence requires that God should punish injustice and violence, and protect the just and innocent, as far as the nature and ends of God's government of the world require; and this the Scripture everywhere declares that God will do: that he is angry with the wicked every day; that he is a refuge and sanctuary, and strong tower and rock of defence to just and righteous men. Not that every particular bad man, who does unjust things, shall be immediately punished for his injustice, nor that every man who has a just and righteous cause shall be protected from the violence and injustice of the wicked; (for the experience of all the world proves that this never was done, and therefore this cannot be the meaning of the promises and threatenings of Scripture;) but there is enough meant by it to vindicate the justice of providence in this world, to be a support to good men, and a terror to the wicked.

(1.) For first, it signifies that in the ordinary course of providence, where there is nothing but the justice or injustice of the cause to be considered, God will favour a just and righteous cause. There may be other wise reasons why God may suffer a just cause to be oppressed, and injustice to be prosperous; and we ought to believe that there are always wise reasons for it, when God does suffer this, be-

cause we certainly know that God is no favourer of injustice; but he who has a just cause may for other reasons deserve to be punished, and then God may justly punish him by unjust oppressors; and thus injustice may be prosperous, and justice oppressed; but where the other sins and demerits of the man do not forfeit God's protection of a just cause, the Divine providence will make a visible distinction between just and unjust.

(2.) And therefore no man can promise himself the Divine protection, but only when his cause is just and right. Which is the reason why the Psalmist, as you have already heard so often, pleads his own innocence and integrity, and the righteousness of his cause to move God to save and defend him. For God has promised his protection upon no other terms; and whenever injustice prospers, it is not in favour to the unjust man, or his unjust cause, but in punishment to others whom God thinks fit to correct and chastise by such injustice. Though wickedness may prosper for a while, there is no way to obtain the Divine favour and protection, but by doing good; for a righteous God can have no favour for an unjust cause, and therefore if we believe that God governs the world, we must expect his protection only in the ways of righteousness, and this will give us a secure hope and dependence on God, "that we shall not be ashamed, while we have respect unto all his commandments."

(3.) And for the same reason, though injustice may prosper for a time, no unjust man can be secure from a Divine vengeance. God does not always punish bad men as soon as they deserve it; but some times he does, and he is always angry with them, and therefore they are always in danger. "God is angry with the wicked every day; if he turn not he will whet his sword, he hath bent his bow, and made it ready, he hath also prepared for him the instruments of death, he hath ordained his arrows against the persecutors." Ps. vii. 11—13.

(4.) And therefore, though every particular good man be not rewarded, nor every bad man punished in this world, yet the Divine providence furnishes us with numerous examples of justice, both in the protection and defence of good

men, and in the punishment of the wicked. This is so notoriously known, that no man can deny it, that besides the ordinary miseries and calamities of sinners, which are the natural and necessary effects and rewards of their sins, and make them the scorn and the pity of mankind, God does very often execute very remarkable judgments upon remarkable sinners, which bear the evident tokens and characters of a divine vengeance on them, and does appear as wonderfully for the preservation of just and good men in a righteous cause. Both sacred and profane story, and our own observation, may furnish us with many examples of both kinds, which are sufficient to vindicate the justice of providence, and the truth of those promises and threatenings which are made in Scripture.

2. The better to understand that account the Scripture gives us of the justice of providence, I observe that the protection and defence of providence is never promised in Scripture merely to a just and righteous cause, but only to just, and righteous, and good men. This is not commonly observed; and yet, as soon as it is named, it is so evident that it needs no proof, and the consequence of it is very considerable.

We cannot indeed separate a just and righteous man from a righteous cause; for as far as he is engaged in an unjust cause, he is an unjust man. But if the Divine protection be promised to the righteous man, not to the righteous cause, then a righteous cause may be oppressed, when the man has no right to God's protection, without any impeachment either of the righteousness or justice of God—which shows the difference, as I observed before, between the justice of providence and the justice of human governments. The justice of human governments considers men's rights—the justice of providence considers their moral deserts. Human justice defends bad men in their just rights—the divine justice, which is supreme and absolute, has no regard to human rights, when the men deserve to be punished. For God challenges to himself such an absolute right and propriety in all things, as to give or take them away when he pleases. And therefore he threatens Israel by the prophet Hosea, that since they had served Baal with the corn, and wine, and

oil, and silver and gold, which he gave them, "Therefore will I return and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax, given to cover her nakedness:" Hos. ii. 8, 9.

The twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus contains the promises and threatenings to Israel, and the condition of both is, their keeping or transgressing his laws, and statutes, and commandments: if they observed his laws, he would bestow all good things on them; if they transgressed his laws, he would take them all away, without any regard to their rights or properties. Among other judgments, he threatens them to deliver them into the hands of their enemies, who should oppress them in their own land, or carry them captive into strange countries. This destroyed all their rights and properties at once. And yet I suppose no man will say, that the Philistines, or Moabites, or Aramites, had any right to invade Canaan, and to bring Israel under their yoke. And Nebuchadnezzar had no better right than they, when he destroyed the temple and city of Jerusalem, and carried the Jews captive to Babylon. But God was very just and righteous in this, though he did not defend them in their just rights, because they had deserved such punishments. And thus throughout the book of Psalms, the protection of the Divine providence is promised only to good and righteous men, to those who love God, who fear, and reverence, and worship, and put their trust in him; that if men be not thus qualified, whatever their cause is, they have no right to the protection of providence. And this is the justice of providence, not to secure human rights, but to protect and defend good men, and to punish the wicked.

3. We may observe also in Scripture, that notwithstanding the justice of providence, and God's love to righteousness and to righteous men, he still, by a sovereign authority, reserves to himself a liberty to correct and chastise good men, and to exercise their graces and virtues, and to serve the ends of his own glory by their sufferings. We must distinguish between acts of discipline and justice, which have very different ends and measures, as the correction of a child differs from the execution of a malefactor. "For

whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. He corrects us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness:" Heb. xii. 7—9. Very good men may fall into such great sins as may deserve a severe correction, not only to give them a greater abhorrence of their sins, and make them more watchful for the future, but to be an example to others. And in such cases repentance itself, though it will obtain their pardon, will not excuse them from temporal punishments, as we see in the example of David, when he had been guilty of adultery and murder. Upon his repentance, God declared his pardon by the prophet Nathan, but would not remit his punishment, which was not so much an act of justice and vengeance, as of necessary discipline. And these are generally the many afflictions of the righteous, out of which, the Psalmist tells us, God will at last deliver them. Whereas the punishments of the wicked, when God, after a long patience, awakes to judgment, are usually for their final ruin and destruction.

Thus good men may have many secret failings and miscarriages, known to none but God and themselves, which may deserve severe corrections: which sometimes are made an argument against the justice of providence, when the correction is visible, but the causes for which they are corrected, unknown.

Other good men suffer for "the trial of their faith, which is more precious than of gold which perisheth," and are trained up by great severities to heroical degrees of virtue. All this is very reconcilable with God's love of righteousness and righteous men, for it is the effect of this love. And thus good men, for a time, may visibly suffer as much as the wicked, which occasions such complaints, that "all things fall alike to all." But such corrections as these are not properly acts of justice, but of discipline; not so much for the punishment of good men, as to make them better; not the effects of anger, but of love.

4. We may observe in Scripture also, that God exercises a sovereign authority in exercising his judgments upon wicked men. He does not always punish them as soon as they

deserve punishment, but sometimes waits patiently for their return; sometimes uses them as the instruments of his justice to punish other bad men, or to correct the miscarriages and to exercise the graces and virtues of good men. And when he has finished what he had to do by them, reserves them for a more public and glorious execution, to be the triumphs of his just vengeance, and standing examples to the world; which we know was the case of Pharaoh, and the king of Assyria, of Antiochus, and some great persecutors of the Christian faith.

Thus have I shown you, wherein the justice of providence consists, both from the nature of the Divine justice and the ends of God's government in this world, and from the account the Scripture gives us of it; which will enable us to answer all the objections against the justice of providence.

I shall observe but one thing more, that it is evident from this discourse, that we must not judge of the goodness of any cause by external and visible success; much less make the oppression of a just cause any argument against the justice of providence. For justice does not oblige God always to favour a just cause, when those who have a just cause deserve to be punished. God may justly punish bad men by unjust oppressors, for he is the sovereign Lord of the world, and can dispose of his creatures as his own absolute authority and unsearchable wisdom shall direct.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOLINESS OF PROVIDENCE.

THE next inquiry is concerning the holiness of providence; for God is a holy being, as holiness is opposed to all impurity and wickedness; and such as God's nature is, such his government must be, and therefore the Psalmist, (Ps. cxlv. 17,) assures us that the Lord is not only "righteous in all his ways," (which signifies the justice of providence, which I have already discoursed of,) but he is "holy in all his works," as he tells us more at large, Ps. v. 4—6: "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man." And yet there want no objections, and such as some men think inexplicable difficulties against the holiness of providence. And therefore my design at present is to set this in as clear a light as I can; and to that end I shall inquire,

1. What the holiness of God requires of him in the government of the world.

2. What it does not require of him. And,

3. What is inconsistent and irreconcilable with the holiness of providence.

And if God govern the world as his essential holiness requires that he should govern it; if what men ignorantly object against providence be no just impeachment of his holiness; and if nothing be justly chargeable on providence which is inconsistent and irreconcilable with the holiness of the Divine nature, I suppose I need then add no more to vindicate the holiness of providence.

1. Now as for the first, the case seems very plain, that the holiness of a governor in the government of reasonable creatures and free agents can require no more of him than to command every thing that is holy, and to forbid all kinds and degrees of wickedness, and to encourage the practice

of virtue, and to discourage all wicked practices as much as the wisdom of government and the freedom of human actions will allow.

That God does all this, wherein the holiness of government consists, I know no man that denies: as wicked as mankind is, it is not for want of holy, and just, and good laws. "The law of the Lord is an undefiled law, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoice the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth light unto the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean and endureth for ever. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether:" Ps. xix. 7—9. The great complaint is that the laws of God are too holy for the corrupt state of this world, and most men think to excuse their wickedness by the degeneracy of human nature, and the too great purity and perfection of the Divine laws, which they have no ability to perform.

Now the holiness of God's laws is an undeniable argument of the holiness of his providence and government, whether we consider these laws as a copy of his nature, or a declaration of his will; much more if we consider them both as his nature and his will, as all moral laws which have an eternal and necessary goodness in them are. For the Divine nature and will must be the rule and measure of his providence and government, unless he govern the world contrary to his own nature and will. Nay, laws themselves are not only the rule of obedience to subjects, but of government to the prince; and it is universally acknowledged to be as great a miscarriage in a prince not to govern by his own laws, as it is in subjects not to obey them. Princes may be guilty of such miscarriages, but God cannot; and therefore the laws he gives to us are the rules of his own providence. And then the holiness of his laws proves that his government and providence must be very holy.

And indeed we have very visible and sensible proofs of this in that care he takes to encourage the practice of virtue, and to discourage wickedness. This he has done by those great promises which he has made to the observation of his laws, and by those terrible threatenings which he has de-

nounced against the breach of them, both in this world and in the world to come. But this is not what I mean, for men can despise both promises and threatenings if they do not see the execution of them; and the promises and threatenings of the other world, which are much the most considerable, are out of sight and do not so much affect bad men; and that which is most proper for us to consider here is how the external administrations of providence encourage virtue, and discourage wickedness and vice.

Now those who believe that all the miseries that are in the world are the effects or rewards of sin, as all men must do who believe the Scripture; nay, as all men must do who believe that a just and good God governs the world, must confess that the Divine providence has done abundantly enough to discourage wickedness; for it is visible enough how many miseries there are in the world—so many and so great as are commonly thought a reproach to providence. But if they be the just recompense of sin, they are only an argument of the justice and holiness of providence.

If we believe the Scripture, mortality and death, and consequently all those infirmities and decays of nature, all those pains, and sicknesses, and diseases, which are not the effect of our own sins, or which we do not inherit from our more immediate parents, as an entail of their sins, are owing to the sin of Adam, which brought death upon himself and all his posterity, and such a curse upon the earth as has entailed labour and sorrow on us.

As for many other miseries and calamities of life, they are visibly owing to our own, or to other men's sins; such as want and poverty, infamy and reproach, seditions and tumults, violent changes and revolutions of government, and all the miseries and desolations of war. Take a survey in your thoughts of all the several sorts of miseries which are in the world, and tell me what place they could find here, by what possible means they could enter into the world, were sin banished out of it. What miseries could disturb human life, were all men just, and honest, and charitable, did they love one another as themselves? Perfect virtue is not only an innocent and harmless, but a very

beneficial thing. It does no hurt, but all the good it can, both to itself and others. And when there is nothing to hurt us, neither within nor without, we can suffer no hurt.

And is not this a sufficient proof of the holiness of providence, that God has so ordered the nature of things, and the circumstances of our life in this world, that if men will be wicked they shall be miserable? Can any thing in this world more discourage men from sin, or make them more zealous to reform themselves and the rest of mankind, than so many daily and sensible proofs that there is no expectation of a secure state of rest and happiness, while either they themselves, or other men with whom they must of necessity converse, or have something to do, are wicked.

For you must remember that I am not now vindicating the justice, but the holiness of providence; and therefore it is no objection against what I have now said, that many times virtuous and innocent men suffer very greatly by the violence and injustice of the wicked. Though this may be an objection against the justice of providence, which I have already accounted for, yet it is no objection against the holiness of providence, but a great justification of it; for the more effectual care God has taken to give all mankind an abhorrence of wickedness, both in themselves and others, the more undeniable proof it is of the holiness of God's government; and this is more effectually done by the evils which we suffer from other men's wickedness, than from our own. Men who are very favourable to their own vices when they feel the pleasures and advantages of them, learn to hate, to condemn, to punish them, by feeling what they suffer from other men's sins. When they lose their own estates by injustice and violence, or their good names by reproaches and defamations, or are injured in the chastity of their wives and daughters by other men's lusts, this gives them a truer sense of the evil of injustice, defamation, and lust, and makes them condemn these vices in themselves, how well soever they love them. This is the foundation of human government which keeps mankind in order, and lays great restraint upon men's lusts; for did not all mankind suffer by one another's sins, I doubt neither good nor bad men would be so zealously concerned to punish and suppress

vice ; and therefore the Divine providence could not have taken a more effectual course to discourage wickedness than to make all mankind sensible of the evil of sin, by making them all, at one time or other, feel the evil of sin, in what they suffer by their own or other men's sins. For were all men convinced, (and it is strange that their own sense and feeling will not convince them,) that all the evils and miseries of life are owing to sin, and that it is impossible to be happy without reforming themselves and others as far as they can, what more powerful argument could providence offer to us to reform the world ?

There is another sort of calamities, and very terrible ones too, which those who believe a providence can attribute to nothing else but the just judgment and vengeance of God upon a wicked world : such as plague, and pestilence, and famine, deluges, and earthquakes, which destroy cities and countries ; and more ordinary accidents, when they act in such an extraordinary manner, as if they were directed and guided by an unseen hand.

A great many such instances are recorded in Scripture and expressly ascribed to the judgment of God. God has threatened such judgments in Scripture, and therefore when we see them executed, we must conclude that they are inflicted by God as the just punishment of sin. Nay, those very evils and miseries which we suffer by other men's sins are in Scripture attributed to God, who has the supreme disposal of all events.

For, as I observed before, it is not sufficient proof that these judgments are not ordered by God, that we can find some immediate causes for them ; that some of them are owing to natural causes, others to men, others to some surprising, or it may be usual accidents ; for whoever believes a Divine providence, does not therefore believe that God does every thing immediately by his own power, without the ministry of any second causes, either natural or free agents, or what we call accidents ; but he is only obliged to believe that God governs all second causes to produce such effects as he sees fit ; that all nature moves at God's command ; that " fire and hail, snow and vapours, wind and storm, fulfil his word," Ps. cxlviii. 8 ; that both good and bad men

are under his government, and the ministers of his providence; and that what seems perfect chance to us, is directed by his wisdom and counsel; and then whatever evils we suffer, and whatever the immediate cause of them be, we must ascribe them all to God; especially when the same kind of judgments which had the same kind of immediate causes, are attributed to God in Scripture, it is reason enough for us, whenever such judgments befall us, to ascribe them to the providence of God.

But I need not dispute here, whether all those evils and calamities which befall sinners are ordered and appointed by God; for till they can prove *a priori*, by direct and positive arguments, that there is no God, nor a providence, (which none of our modern atheists pretend to do,) while they dispute only by way of objection, they must prove that things are not so ordered as they ought to have been ordered, did God govern the world; and if we can prove that they are, their objection is answered. Now with respect to my present argument, to vindicate the holiness of providence, it is plain beyond all contradiction, that things are so ordered for the discouragement of wickedness and the encouragement of virtue, as if they had been so ordered on purpose by the greatest wisdom, and the most perfect holiness; and therefore we have reason to believe, that they were so ordered by a wise and holy providence.

As far then as to command and encourage all holiness and virtue, and to forbid and discourage all wickedness and vice, is a proof of the holiness of providence, I hope that I have sufficiently cleared this point; and I must desire you to observe, that these are direct and positive proofs, such as every man may understand, and cannot avoid the evidence of, and therefore are not to be shaken by every difficulty objected against them: for our knowledge is so imperfect that there is nothing almost which we so certainly know, but is liable to such objections as we cannot easily and satisfactorily answer; but one plain positive proof is a better reason to believe any thing than a hundred objections against it are not to believe it; because since it is confessed on all hands, that our knowledge is very imperfect, it is no reason to disbelieve what we do know, and what we are as

certain of, as we can be of any thing, because there are some things relating to the same subject which we do not know; and therefore, unless the objection be as positive and evident as the proof is, (and I am sure there are no such objections against the holiness of providence,) we may very reasonably acknowledge that there are difficulties which we do not understand, and yet may very reasonably believe on as we did.

(2.) Let us now consider, what the holiness of God's providence and government does not require of him: and I shall name one thing which some men make a great objection against providence, viz. that there is so much sin and wickedness daily committed in the world. Now if the being of sin in the world, or if the wickedness of men were irreconcilable with the holiness of providence, this were an unanswerable objection against it; for it cannot be denied, but that mankind are very wicked. But what consequence is there in this; that God cannot be holy, nor his providence holy, because men are wicked? We may as well prove that there is no God, because there is a devil. Such conceits as these tempted some ancient heretics to assert two principles, a good and a bad God, because they thought, that if there were but one God, and he very good, there could be no such thing as evil in the world.

But would any man think this a good argument against the holiness of a prince and his government, that he has many wicked subjects? and how then do the sins of men come to be an argument against the holiness of providence?

To state this in a few words: when we speak of God's permitting sin, we either mean the internal or the external acts of sin.

(1.) The internal act of sin, which is nothing else but the choice of the will: when men choose that which is wicked, and fully resolve and purpose, as they have opportunity, to do it. This is the sin, this makes us guilty before God, who knows our hearts, though human laws can take no cognisance of it; as our Saviour tells us, "He that looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." He who intends, and resolves

it, and wants nothing but an opportunity to commit adultery, is an adulterer.

If God then must not permit sin, he must not suffer men to will and to choose any thing that is wicked, for this is the sin—herein the immorality of the act consists. Consider then what the meaning of this is, that God must not leave men to the liberty of their own choice, but must always overrule their minds by an irresistible power, to choose that which is good and to refuse the evil. But will any one say, that this is to govern men like men? Is this the natural government of free agents, to take away their liberty and freedom of choice? Does government signify destroying the nature of those creatures which are to be governed? Does this become God, to make a free agent, and to govern him by necessity and force?

This, I confess, is a certain way to keep sin out of the world, but it thrusts holiness out of the world too; for where there is no liberty of choice, there can be neither moral good nor evil; and this would be a more reasonable objection against the holiness of providence, that it banishes holiness out of the world.

I grant that God governs the minds of men as well as their external actions; directs and influences their counsels; suggests wise thoughts to them; excites good men to great and virtuous actions, and lays invisible restraints upon the lusts and passions of bad men; turns their hearts; changes their counsels, and diverts them from ill-laid designs, especially when they have no external restraints on them, and the pursuing such counsel would be very hurtful to the world, or to the church of God. Nay, I deny not but in such cases God may, by an irresistible power and influence, govern the minds of men, not to make them good, but to make them the instruments of providence in doing such good as they have no inclination to do, and to chain up their passions that they may not do that hurt which they intended to do, as I have shown at large above.

And I see nothing in this which unbecomes the wise and sovereign Lord of the world; sometimes by an immediate power to govern the minds, as well as the bodies of

men, that they shall no more be able to will and choose than they are to do what they themselves please. For though God has made man a reasonable creature, and free agent, he has not wholly put him out of his own power, but that when he sees fit he can lay invisible restraints upon him, or clap a counter-bias upon his mind, which shall lead him contrary to the natural tendency of his own will and lusts. Thus it is in the natural world:—Though God has endowed all creatures with natural virtues and qualities, and in the ordinary course of his providence suffers them to produce their natural effects, yet he has reserved to himself a sovereign authority over nature, to reverse its laws, or suspend its influences by an immediate and supernatural power. And I see no reason why God may not do this in the moral, as well as in the natural world, when the good government of the world requires it.

But though God may thus sometimes by a supernatural power influence the minds of men, and chain up their lusts and passions, yet this is not the natural government of mankind, considered as free agents; and it would no more become God always to overrule men's wills in this manner, than it would always to overpower nature, and to govern the natural world, not by its natural virtues and powers, but by constant miracles.

And if the ordinary and natural government of mankind, considered as reasonable and free agents, requires that God should leave men to the liberty and freedom of their own choice, which is the only thing that can be judged, and that is capable of rewards and punishments, then it is no reasonable objection against the holiness of providence, that God permits men to choose wickedly; that he does not always, by an irresistible and sovereign power, hinder the internal acts of sin; especially when we consider that God gives men all those internal assistances of his grace, and lays all those internal restraints upon their lusts and passions, which are consistent with the liberty of human actions. Though we know not in what manner the Holy Spirit works upon the minds of men, yet this we know, if we believe the gospel of our Saviour, that "God worketh in us both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure:" that "he gives his Holy

Spirit to those who ask him," to be a principle of a spiritual life in them. And bad men themselves, if they will but confess what they feel, must tell you what strugglings they find in their own minds, before they can yield to the temptations of sin—how, in some cases, especially at their first entrance upon a sinful course of life, natural modesty, in others natural pity and compassion, in others a natural greatness and generosity of mind, gives check to them—how at first they blush at the thoughts of any wickedness, and are reproached by their own consciences for it—how they tremble at the thought of a future judgment, or some present vengeance to overtake them; and can never sin securely till they have laughed away the thoughts of God, and of another world. Such care God has taken to make sin uneasy to the minds of men, and to reconcile them to the love of virtue, and after all, if they will be wicked, (as free agents may be if they will,) this can be no blemish to the holiness of providence, because it is no fault of providence to leave free agents to the freedom of their own choice.

(2.) As for the external acts of sin, it must be confessed that God permits a great deal of wickedness to be actually committed; such as thefts, murders, adulteries, perjuries, and the like. Now this requires a different consideration, for in human governments this is thought a great miscarriage, to suffer any wickedness to be actually committed, which we can hinder the commission of. No man would be thought innocent, much less a prince, who should see a man murdered, a virgin defloured, a robbery, or any other villanies committed, without interposing to hinder the commission of such wickedness, when it was in his power to do it. And how then can we vindicate the holiness of providence, which sees and observes, and could easily hinder the commission of such wickedness as it daily permits? Now rightly to understand this matter we must consider,

First, That God cannot always, by an immediate power, hinder the actual commission of sin, without a perpetual violation of the order of nature, and therefore this does not properly belong to an ordinary providence which is the government of all creatures according to their natures. We know indeed, that when Jeroboam in great anger stretched

out his hand against the prophet who cried against the altar at Bethel, his hand immediately dried up so that he could not pull it in again: 1 Kings, xiii. 4. And that when Uzziah would have usurped the priest's office to burn incense, he was immediately smitten with leprosy: 2 Chron. xxvi. 19. And there is no other way but this, for God by an immediate power to hinder the actual commission of sin, to take away men's lives, or their natural powers of acting, which may be of great use sometimes when God sees fit to work miracles, but ought to be as rare as miracles are; for such a way as this of hindering sin would quickly put an end to the world, or to the commerce and conversation of it, and is properly to judge the world, not to govern it.

Secondly, And therefore, though God does take care to prevent a great deal of wickedness, which men intend and resolve to commit, and watch for opportunities of committing, yet he does it not by an immediate supernatural power, but in human ways; and for this reason commands us, not only to do no wickedness ourselves, but by our advice, and counsels, and reproofs, authority and power, to hinder other men from doing wickedly. And this is one way whereby God hinders the actual commission of many sins, by obliging us to hinder the commission of them as much as we can; which shows how men are obliged to hinder the commission of those sins which God is not obliged by an immediate and supernatural power to hinder.

Thirdly, To be sure, for God to permit the actual commission of sin, can be no greater blemish to the holiness of providence than to permit men to conceive sin in their hearts; for therein the moral evil consists when the will chooses and consents to it. The external action may be a natural, political or economical evil, but the moral evil is in the will and choice. And therefore the permitting or hindering the external commission of sin does not so properly concern the holiness as the justice and goodness of providence; for to hinder the actual commission of sin does not prevent the guilt of sin, for the man has the guilt of those sins which he would, but could not commit. But it hinders that mischief which the actual commission of sin would have done to other

men, by murdering their persons, or defiling their wives, or robbing them of their estates and good names.

Fourthly, And therefore there may be wise reasons for God to permit the external commission of many sins, as acts of judgment and vengeance on other sinners, or as acts of correction and discipline on good men. For since God very rarely punishes bad men, or corrects good men by an immediate power, and yet punishments or corrections are the proper exercise of providence, it cannot unbecome God to make the sins of some the corrections and punishments of others. That it is so, is so visible that I need not prove it, for few men suffer any great evils, but from other men's sins; and if God take care, as most certainly he does, to direct the evil which men's sins do, to light upon those who deserve to suffer by them, it is a mighty vindication of the wisdom and justice of providence, and a sufficient reason why God should permit the external commission of sin.

Fifthly, Especially considering how many wise and good ends God can serve by permitting sin, as to render sin itself infamous and hateful by the great mischief it does in the world—to expose the sinner himself to shame and punishment, which both deters other men from sin, and contributes very much to reform the sinner. Nay, many times God brings about great and excellent designs by the sins of men, both for the advancement of his own glory, and the good of mankind, of which many instances may be given were it needful; which is no excuse for men's sins, nor any reason why God should order and overrule men by his providence to commit such sins, but is a very justifiable reason why God should permit the actual commission of sin, when he can bring good out of evil, and serve the wise ends of his providence by it.

Sixthly, And therefore lastly, God does hinder the actual commission of sin as often as he sees fit to hinder the evil and mischief which such sins will do, as I have already observed. Sometimes he very remarkably disappoints wicked designs from taking effect, as it was in the case of Haman and Mordecai, when the Jews were devoted to destruction: and we have as many instances of this nature as we have discoveries of plots and treasons against the lives of princes,

and the peace of church and state, or private designs against the lives and fortunes of private men; and how much unknown wickedness the Divine providence every day prevents we cannot tell; but all the wickedness mankind would commit, but cannot, must be attributed to the restraints and prevention of providence. And then I doubt not but every bad man can give a great many instances of such disappointments which he himself has met with. That as much evil as there is committed in the world, yet, considering the great wickedness and degeneracy of mankind, we have reason to believe that God hinders a hundred times more than he permits. And considering the wisdom and justice of providence, it becomes us to think that God never permits the actual commission of any sin, but he orders it for some wise and good ends. And this I hope is sufficient to vindicate the holiness of providence, notwithstanding so much wickedness as is daily committed.

(3.) The Divine providence is not justly chargeable with any thing that is utterly inconsistent or irreconcilable with the holiness of government.

Now since the permission of sin is very reconcilable with the holiness of providence, there can be no other reasonable objection against it, unless we could prove by plain and undeniable evidence that God is the cause and author of sin. And this indeed would prove that God does not govern the world with holiness, if he had any proper efficiency in the sins of men; that is, did God tempt men to sin, or by any secret influences and impulses incline and even compel them to sin.

But the least thought and imagination of this is a very great blasphemy, and the greater and more unpardonable the blasphemy, because there is no temptation to suspect any such thing of God. There is no way of knowing this but either by our own sense and experience, or by reason, or by revelation.

As for our own sense and experience, this can prove nothing: for no man finds any other force or impulse but from his own lusts and sinful inclinations: "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed:" James i. 14. Those who charge God with inclining

men's hearts to wickedness, confess that this is done by such secret influences as no man can distinguish from the workings of his own mind, which is plainly to confess that they cannot tell by their own sense and feeling that they are thus moved and inclined by God, but only charge their sins on God to excuse themselves. Every man feels what it is that tempts him, his love of riches, of pleasures, or honours; and that the temptation and impulse is weaker or stronger in proportion to his fondness and passion for these tempting objects; but yet he feels himself at liberty to choose and determine himself, and finds a principle within him which resists and opposes his compliance with the temptation as contrary to the will and law of God, and the dictates of right reason, and that for which God will punish him. And is there any reason for men to charge their sins upon God, when the only thing that gives check to them and makes sin uneasy, is the conviction of their own consciences, that it is what God has forbid, and what he will punish. This I think is no evidence of God's tempting and inclining men to sin, that he has imprinted on our minds such a natural sense of his abhorrence of all evil, and such a natural awe and dread of his justice, that while we preserve this sense strong and vigorous, no temptation can fasten on us.

If we appeal to reason, the reason of mankind proves that God does not, and cannot tempt, incline, and overrule men to choose or to act any wickedness; for this is a direct contradiction to the holiness and purity of his nature, and the justice of his providence. All mankind believe God to be perfect holiness, which is essential to the very notion of a God; and reason tells us, that such a pure and holy being cannot be the author of sin. Now were it possible to vindicate the justice of providence in the punishment of sin did men sin by divine impulses, or by necessity and fate.

And the Scripture teaches this in express words: "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man;" Jas. i. 13. And all the laws, and promises and threatenings, exhortations, reproofs and passionate expostulations, which we meet with in Scripture, if they mean any thing sincere, do necessarily suppose that men sin freely,

and that God is so far from inclining and tempting men to sin, that he does all that becomes a wise and holy being to restrain and deter them from it.

Now when we have such direct and positive proofs that God is not and cannot be the author of sin, it is certain that we can have no direct and positive proof that he is, nor is any such proof pretended; and then some remote and uncertain consequences, which are owing to our ignorance or confused and imperfect notions of things, or to some obscure expressions of Scripture, are not, and ought not to be thought sufficient to disprove a direct and positive evidence—no more than the difficulties about the nature of motion are a just reason to deny that there is any motion, when we daily see and feel ourselves and the whole world move. And yet such kind of difficulties as these is all that is pretended to charge the providence of God with the sins of men—the most material of which I intend at this time to examine.

1. One, and that the most plausible pretence to destroy the liberty of human actions, and to charge the sins of men upon God, is his prescience and foreknowledge of all future events. That God does foreknow things to come, is generally acknowledged by heathens, Jews and Christians; and prophecy is a plain demonstration of it, for he that can foretell things to come, must foreknow them.

Now from hence they thus argue: what is certainly foreknown, must certainly be; and what is thus certain, is necessary; and therefore, if all future events are certain, as being certainly foreknown, then all things, even all the sins of men, are owing to necessity and fate; and then God, who is the author of this necessity and fate, must be the cause and author of men's sins too.

Now, in answer to this, I readily grant that nothing can be certainly foreknown, but what will certainly be; but then I deny that nothing will certainly be, but what has a necessary cause; for we see ten thousand effects of free or contingent causes, which certainly are, though they might never have been; for whatever is, certainly is; and whatever certainly is now, was certainly, though not necessarily, future a thousand years ago. That man understands very little, who knows not the difference between the necessity and the

certainty of an event. No event is necessary, but that which has a necessary cause, as the rising and setting of the sun; but every event is certain, which will certainly be, though it be produced by a cause which acts freely, and might do otherwise if it pleased, as all the free actions of men are,—some of which, though done with the greatest freedom, may be as certain, and as certainly known, as the rising of the sun. Now if that which is done freely, may be certain, and that which is certain, may be certainly known, then the certainty of God's foreknowledge only proves the certainty, but not the necessity of the event; and then God may foreknow all events, and yet lay no necessity on mankind to do any thing that is wicked.

In the nature of the thing, foreknowledge lays no greater necessity upon that which is foreknown, than knowledge does upon that which is known; for foreknowledge is nothing but knowledge, and knowledge is not the cause of the thing which is known, much less the necessary cause of it. We certainly know at what time the sun will rise and set every day in the year, but our knowledge is not the cause of the sun's rising or setting: nay, in many cases, in proportion to our knowledge of men, we may with great certainty foretell what they will do, and how they will behave themselves in such or such circumstances; and did we perfectly know them, we should rarely, if ever, mistake; for though men act freely, they do not act arbitrarily, but there is always some bias upon their minds, which inclines and draws them; and the more confirmed habits men have of virtue or vice, the more certainly and steadily they act, and the more certainly we may know them, without making them either virtuous or vicious.

Now could we certainly know what all men would do, before they do it, yet it is evident that this would neither make nor prove them to be necessary agents. And therefore, though the perfection of the Divine knowledge is such as to know our thoughts afar off, before we think them, yet this does not make us think such thoughts nor do such actions.

How God can foreknow things to come, even such events as depend upon the most free and contingent causes, we

cannot tell; but it is not incredible that infinite knowledge should do this, when wise men, whose knowledge is so very imperfect, can with such great probability, and almost to the degree of certainty, foresee many events, which depend also upon free and contingent causes: and if we will allow that God's prescience is owing to the perfection of his knowledge, then it is certain that it neither makes nor proves any fatal necessity of events. If we say, indeed, as some men do, that God foreknows all things, because he has absolutely decreed whatever should come to pass; this, I grant, does infer a fatal necessity; and yet in this case it is not God's foreknowledge, but his decree, which creates the necessity. All things, upon this supposition, are necessary, not because God foreknows them, but because by his unalterable decrees he has made them necessary; he foreknows, because they are necessary, but does not make them necessary by foreknowing them: but if this were the truth of the case, God's prescience, considered only as foreknowing, would be no greater perfection of knowledge than men have, who can certainly foreknow what they certainly intend to do, and it seems God can do no more. But thus much we learn from these men's confession, that foreknowledge, in its own nature, lays no necessity upon human actions; that if God can foreknow what he has not absolutely and peremptorily decreed, how certain soever such events may be, his foreknowledge does not make them necessary. And therefore we cannot prove the necessity of all events from God's foreknowledge, till we have first proved that God can foreknow nothing but what is necessary: that is in truth, that there is no such perfection as prescience belonging to the Divine nature; for to foreknow things in a decree, or only in necessary causes, is no more that perfection of knowledge which we call prescience, than it is prescience in us to know what we intend to do to-morrow, or that the sun will rise to-morrow. But that God's foreknowledge is not owing to a necessity of the event, and therefore cannot prove any such necessity, is evident from hence, that the Scripture, which attributes this foreknowledge to God, does also assert the liberty of human actions, charges men's sins and final ruin on themselves, sets before them life and death, blessing and cursing, as I

observed before: now how difficult soever it may be to reconcile prescience and liberty, it is certain, that necessity and liberty can never be reconciled; and therefore, if men act freely, they do not act necessarily; and if God does foreknow what men will do, and yet men act freely, then it is certain that God foreknows what men will freely do: that is, that foreknowledge is not owing to the necessity, but to the perfection of knowledge: and this is enough to satisfy all Christians, who cannot reason nicely about these matters, that this argument from prescience to prove the necessity of human actions, and consequently to charge men's sins upon God, must be fallacious and deceitful, because the Scripture teaches the foreknowledge of God, and yet charges the guilt of men's sins upon themselves: and if we believe the Scripture, we must believe both these; and then we must confess, that prescience does not destroy liberty.

2. Another objection against the holiness of providence is this; that God does not only foreknow, but decrees, such events as are brought to pass by the sins of men; and therefore, at least in such cases, he must decree men's sins too. We have a famous example of this in the crucifixion of our Saviour;—never was there a more wicked action committed, and yet St. Peter tells the Jews, that this was the effect of God's counsels and decrees: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Acts ii. 23.

But if we consider the words carefully, this very text will answer the objection. For what does St. Peter say was done "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God?" Did they "take him, and by wicked hands crucify him and slay him, by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God?" This is not said; but he was "delivered," that is, put into their power, "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," and then they took him, and with wicked hands slew him: and then we must observe, that here are two distinct acts of God relating to this event; "the determinate counsel," and the "foreknowledge of God." The will or counsel of God, which he had foreordained and predetermined, the βουλὴ προωρισμένη was, that Christ should die, an expiatory sacrifice for the

sins of the world, which was a work of such stupendous wisdom, goodness, holiness, and justice, that nothing could more become God than such counsels and decrees. But then by his infinite prescience and foreknowledge he saw by what means this would be done, if he thought fit to permit it; viz. by the treachery of Judas, by the malice of the Scribes and Pharisees, and by the compliance of the Roman powers; and this he determined to permit, and to deliver him up into their hands; the certain effect of which would be, that they would take him, and with wicked hands crucify him, and slay him. So that though God did decree that Christ should die, yet he did not decree that Judas should betray or that the Scribes and Pharisees, and Pontius Pilate, should condemn and crucify him; but this he foresaw, and this he decreed to permit, and to accomplish his own wise counsels for the salvation of mankind by such wicked instruments; and there is nothing in all this unworthy of God, or unbecoming the holiness of his providence. And thus it is with reference to all other events, which are decreed by God; he never decrees any thing but what is holy and good; and though he many times accomplishes his wise decrees by the wickedness and sins of men, yet he never decrees their sins; but by his foresight and wonderful wisdom, so disposes and orders things as to make their sins, which they freely and resolvedly commit, and which nothing but an irresistible power could hinder them from committing, serve the wise and gracious ends of his providence. This is wisdom too wonderful for us; but thus we know it may be; and thus the Scripture assures us it is.

3. Another pretence for charging God with the sins of men, is from some obscure expressions of Scripture; which, when expounded to a strict literal sense, as some men expound them, seem to attribute to God some kind of causality and efficiency in the sins of men.

But unless we will make the Scripture contradict itself, it is certain that those few texts which seem to make God the author of sin, are misunderstood; because not only some few particular texts, but all the natural notions we have of God, the very nature and design of religion, and three parts of the Bible, either directly or by necessary con-

sequence, prove the contrary. And supposing then that we could give no tolerable account of such texts, is it not more reasonable to conclude that it is only our ignorance of the eastern language and phrase, which makes them obscure and difficult to us, than to expound them to such a sense as contradicts all the rest of the Bible?

But I do not intend this for an answer, or as some will call it, an evasion, but shall consider these texts particularly. And the first place relates to God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart, that he should not let the people of Israel go, notwithstanding all the signs and wonders which Moses wrought in Egypt; (Ex. iv. 21,) where God expressly tells Moses that he would "harden Pharaoh's heart;" and in the story itself it is several times expressed, that "God did harden Pharaoh's heart;" and he who hardens the heart seems to be the efficient cause of all those sins which such a hard heart commits.

Now rightly to understand this, which has given so much trouble to divines, there are many things to be considered.

Hardness of heart is a metaphorical expression, and signifies such a firmness and obstinacy of temper or resolution as will yield to no motives or persuasions, that will no more receive any impressions than a hard and impenetrable rock. And therefore to harden the heart is to give it such a stiffness and obstinacy as will not yield. But then there are several ways of hardening men's hearts, and some of them very innocent and holy, as well as just; and before we charge the Divine providence upon this account, we must know in what way God hardens. Immediately to infuse into men's hearts an unrelenting hardness and obstinacy in a sinful course, is inconsistent with the holiness of providence, and would, in the most proper sense, make God the author of sin; but, though God says he would harden Pharaoh, he does not say that he would infuse hardness into Pharaoh's heart.

For we may observe that men who have first hardened themselves, take the most innocent occasions to grow harder; nay, are hardened by such usage as would either break or soften other men. And those who treat them in such a manner as their wicked hearts abuse to harden them-

selves, may be said to harden them, as in common speech we charge those with undoing and hardening their children and servants, who have spoiled them by too much indulgence or by too great severity; and this is the account that Origen gives of it. And indeed when men are said to harden themselves, as Pharaoh is often said "to harden his own heart," and yet God is said to harden them, there can be no other account given of it but this, that men take occasion from what God does—take occasion where no occasion was given, to harden themselves; as St. Paul observes the Jews did, from God's patience and long-suffering, Rom. ii. 4, 5: "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance;" i. e. should lead thee to repentance, not harden thee in sin, though it have another effect through thy own wickedness. "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart," growest more hard and impenitent by God's forbearance, "and treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." And thus God hardened Pharaoh, and thus Pharaoh took occasion to harden himself from those judgments which ought to have softened him; and God, foreseeing that this would be the effect of it, says, I will harden Pharaoh's heart; not, I will infuse hardness into him, but I will do such things as I certainly know his hard and wicked heart will improve into new occasions and new degrees of hardness. For it is no reason either for God or men to forbear doing what wisdom, and justice, and goodness, direct to be done, because hardened sinners will harden themselves the more by it. And that this is the truth of the case, appears from the whole story.

That which hardened Pharaoh, and made him so resolved not to part with Israel, was the great advantage which he made of their service and bondage, which made him impatient to think of sending away a people which were so useful to him. To conquer this obstinate humour, God sends Moses to deliver "Israel with mighty arm and outstretched hand." Moses wrought such mighty wonders, and inflicted such miraculous and terrible judgments on Egypt, as

any one would have thought the most proper means not to have hardened, but to have broken and subdued the most hardened hearts; but this had a contrary effect upon a hardened Pharaoh, and it is visible what it was that hardened him—not the true God, but his god, interest.

Some of these signs and wonders were imitated by the magicians, as turning their rods into serpents, and water into blood, and bringing frogs upon the land; and upon this he hardened his heart, though the plague of frogs was so grievous that it made him somewhat relent, and promise to let the people go and sacrifice unto the Lord, if the frogs might be removed; but then God's goodness in removing this plague hardened him, as it is expressly observed, that "when Pharaoh saw there was respite, he hardened his heart:" Exod. viii. 15. And thus it was in the succeeding judgments: while any judgment was upon him, he yielded, and promised fair to let the people go:—that had any one of these judgments continued on him till he had parted with Israel, he had certainly sent them away long before; but when he saw one judgment removed after another, he thought there would be an end of them at last, and it were better to endure a while than to part with Israel: and thus God hardened his heart, and he hardened his own heart, till the death of all the first-born put him, and his servants, and all the people, into such a terrible fright that they were glad to get rid of Israel, to save their own lives.

And to complete all, God still hardened Pharaoh's heart to pursue after Israel, that he might overthrow him and all his host in the Red Sea; and for that end, "God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea, that Pharaoh might say, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in: and it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" Exod. xiii. 17; xiv. 3—5. The report of their flying, and the apprehension of their being entangled in the wilderness, made Pharaoh and his servants quickly forget what they had suffered in Egypt, and think of nothing but the loss of the service of Israel, which hardened them to

a new pursuit, and was ordered by God to that end, that "he might be honoured upon Pharaoh and upon all his host." This is the account the Scripture gives us of God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart, which contains nothing that unbecomes a wise and a holy Being. For though it can never become a holy God to infuse hardness into men's hearts, yet when men have hardened themselves, and will abuse all the wise methods of providence to harden themselves, and are now ripe for destruction, it very much becomes a just and righteous God to exercise them with such providences as he knows will still harden them, till they make themselves such infamous examples of wickedness as may deserve a more glorious and exemplary vengeance,—which is another thing to be considered in the case of Pharaoh, and very necessary to the full understanding of this difficult case of God's hardening of men's hearts.

God had peremptorily decreed not only to deliver Israel, but to punish Egypt, both king and people, for the cruel oppression of Israel. And therefore he might, without any more solemnity, have destroyed Pharaoh, his people and land, and have carried Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand. But when they had deserved to be punished and destroyed, and God had resolved to punish them, the manner of their punishment was at the free disposal of the Divine wisdom; and therefore he chose to punish them in such a way as might make the glory and power of the God of Israel known to the world. And this is the very account which God himself gives, why he took such a course with Pharaoh as he foresaw would harden and confirm him in his resolutions of not parting with Israel, when he could have forced him, at the expense of fewer miracles, to have sent them away if he had so pleased. "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them:" Exod. vii. 3—5. The same thing he tells

Pharaoh: "I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth. For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up," have all this time preserved thee, and not cut thee off, "for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth:" Exod. ix. 14—16. And this reason God gives why he hardened Pharaoh's heart to pursue Israel: "I will be honoured upon Pharaoh and upon all his host, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord:" Exod. xiv. 4. This is diligently to be observed to vindicate the holiness and justice of providence. For though God infuses no hardness into men's hearts, yet if he exercise them with such providences as he foresees will harden them, and does this with an intention and design to harden them, this signifies his will to harden them, and such a moral efficiency in using hardening providences, as will as certainly harden them, as if he had infused hardness into them. And this makes little difference, whether God hardens men by external providences, or by an internal operation on their minds, when he intends such providences to harden them, and knows that they will effectually do it.

Now I readily grant that though God infused no hardness into Pharaoh's heart, nor did any thing which unbecomes a holy God to do, yet he did intend to harden him, and did intend to harden him on purpose to multiply his judgments on Egypt, and to destroy him and all his host in the Red Sea; for this is so plainly expressed that we cannot deny it. Nay, I readily grant that the providence of God would be justly chargeable with men's sins, did he, without any respect to the merit and desert of the persons, by such insensible methods, betray them into sin with an intention to harden them; for what man is there of such a firm and constant virtue, as to be able to resist all temptations which a long series of providences, chosen and directed for that purpose by a Divine wisdom, could bring him into?

But yet when men have sinned themselves into such a

hardened state as to deserve to be destroyed, and when God is so far provoked by their sins as to resolve to destroy them, it becomes the wisdom and the justice of God, without any impeachment of his holiness, to harden men by external events and appearances; not in sin, which can never become a holy God, but in such ruinous courses as their own wicked hearts betray them to, and as will bring inevitable ruin on them. And this is the true resolution of this case:—

1. That God never hardens any men till they have deserved to be destroyed, and he is resolved to destroy them.

2. That then he does not harden them in sin, but in such ruinous counsels as their own sins betray them to.

3. That all this is done, not by the natural or moral efficacy, but by their own wicked abuse of the Divine providence.

4. To complete all, when God has thus determined to destroy any person or people, he many times inflicts on them a penal blindness and infatuation, not to see the things which concern their peace.

These four particulars contain a full and easy account of this perplexed doctrine of God's hardening men's hearts, and therefore I shall speak distinctly, but briefly to them.

1. That God never hardens men till they have deserved to be destroyed, and he is resolved to destroy them. This must be laid down as the foundation of all; for by what means soever God hardens men, how innocent soever they may appear, if he intends to harden them, not because they deserve it and he has determined to destroy them, but only that they may deserve to be destroyed, and that he may with some fair appearance of justice destroy them, it would be impossible to satisfy equal and impartial judges of the holiness of providence. But if men have hardened themselves in sin beyond all the ordinary methods of recovery, and have so provoked a good and merciful God that he gives them over to ruin and destruction, then by what means soever they are hardened, which are not directly sinful, there can be no just reason to question either the justice, or goodness, or holiness of God upon this account. For when men have sinned to that degree as to deserve imme-

diate destruction, and to provoke God to pass a final sentence on them, God may either immediately destroy them, or keep them in that hardened state, like condemned malefactors reserved in chains for a more public and solemn execution. And this is all that is meant by God's hardening men, and this all mankind must allow to be just and holy.

This was the case of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who had so grievously oppressed Israel that God was resolved to punish them for it. And therefore he sent Moses to inflict a great many miraculous judgments on them, not intending thereby to convince Pharaoh, who had hardened himself against the power of miracles to convince him, and whom he had resolved to destroy, but only to lay Egypt waste, and to take a signal vengeance upon that cruel persecutor, by overthrowing him and his host in the Red Sea. And therefore he so ordered the execution of these judgments, that the hardened heart of Pharaoh should grow more hardened by them.

Thus when God had determined to cut off Ahab, as his grievous sins had long before deserved, he intended to harden him to go up to Ramoth-Gilead, and fall there: and for that purpose suffered a lying spirit to enter into his prophets, to encourage the king in that fatal expedition; and as God had foretold, they did prevail against Micaiah, the prophet of the Lord, who plainly told him, that he should fall in it: 1 Kings, xxii.

Thus when God was so provoked with the sins of Judah, that he had resolved to deliver them into the hands of the Chaldeans, who should destroy their city and temple, and carry them captive to Babylon, he pronounced this hardening sentence on them: "Go, and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." What this means ye shall hear more hereafter; all that I observe at present is, that this sentence was not pronounced against them, till God had resolved to carry them into captivity, and to lay their city and country desolate, as the prophet tells us in the

next verse. "Then, said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate:" Isaiah vi. 9—11.

And this was the state of the Jews in our Saviour's days, when God had determined the final destruction of the Jewish nation, their city, temple, and polity, for their great sin in crucifying their Messias, as Christ tells us, Matthew xxiii. 37—39: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Luke xix. 41—44: "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knowest not the time of thy visitation."

Now with respect to this final sentence which God had pronounced against them, though he delayed the execution of it for forty years, St. Paul applies to them the case of a hardened Pharaoh, whom God spared also a great while, as he did them, though he had determined to destroy him by a signal overthrow; "to show his power, and that his name might be declared throughout all the earth." And there was no reason to quarrel with God, though he delayed to destroy them for some years after he had determined to destroy them, to make them also a more remarkable example of a just vengeance, and more glorious power. "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endureth with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction?" That is, delays for many years the execution of those whom he has decreed to destroy

for their great sins, by an irreversible sentence: for such only are "the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction;" Rom. ix. 17, 22. And, for the same reason, he applies to them the prophecy of Isaiah, concerning the judicial blindness and deafness of the Jewish nation, when God had determined to deliver them into the hands of the king of Babylon, which was a prophesy of them also, and received its full accomplishment in the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans: Acts xxviii. 26, 27. So that it is plain from all these examples, (and I know no example in all the Scripture to the contrary,) that God never hardens men, till he has first determined to punish or to destroy them. And I shall only add, that this hardening, which is the effect of God's decree to punish, or to destroy, relates only to some temporal evils and calamities which God intends to bring on them, not to the eternal miseries of the next world. God is never said to harden any men, that he may eternally damn them, that is wholly owing to their own hard and impenitent hearts; but God does sometimes harden men, in order to take a more exemplary vengeance on them in this world, which serves the wise ends of providence, and makes his power and glory known.

2. This will more evidently appear, if we consider that God is never said to harden any men in sin, but he only hardens and confirms them in such ruinous counsels as will bring that destruction on them, which God has ordained and determined for them. They harden themselves in sin, and make it wise and just for God to punish or destroy them; and when God resolves to do so, then sometimes he hardens them in such courses as will bring a terrible vengeance on them.

I need instance only in the case of Pharaoh, which is the most express text we have for God's hardening men. Now what did God harden Pharaoh in? Did he harden him against believing Moses and those miracles which he wrought in the name and by the power of the God of Israel? No such matter; there is no such thing said; but he hardened him not to let the people go.

Pharaoh hardened himself against believing Moses and the miracles he wrought, against owning and submitting to

the power and sovereign authority of the God of Israel; though when he felt the judgments inflicted on him, they were so uneasy as to make him relent, and to promise to send Israel away. But his great concernment was how to keep Israel, and to get rid of these plagues; and his firm resolution was never to part with Israel as long as he had any hopes that he might keep them safely. Now, though it was indeed a very great evil to disbelieve Moses, and to disobey God's command, attested and confirmed by miracles; yet, separated from this, it was no moral evil not to part with Israel, who had now been the subjects of Egypt for above two hundred years. And therefore when the dispute was not about believing and obeying God and Moses, which Pharaoh had no regard to, but only whether he should let Israel go to avoid these plagues which he suffered for their sake. Though God did not harden him in his infidelity and disobedience, yet he did harden him against parting with Israel: that is, he hardened him not in sin, for the infidelity and disobedience, which was the only sinfulness of it, was wholly his own. But he hardened him in the most ruinous counsel he could possibly have taken, which would bring new plagues on Egypt, and end in his own final ruin.

This was the case of Ahab; God did resolve to send him to Ramoth-Gilead to fall there, and suffered a lying spirit to enter into the mouths of his prophets, and to harden him in that expedition against the prophetic threatenings of Micaiah —that all things considered, it may be said that God persuaded, and that God hardened Ahab to go to Ramoth-Gilead. Now suppose this, yet it is not to harden him in sin; for it was no sin to go to fight against Ramoth-Gilead; but it was only to harden him in a dangerous attempt, and which God intended should be fatal to him.

A great many instances of this nature may be given, where God hardens men in such courses as shall and are intended by God to prove either a very sore punishment to them, or their utter ruin. But no one instance can be given of God's persuading, or tempting, or hardening men in any thing, which is in its own nature evil. And were this well considered, it would answer and shame a great many ignorant objections against providence.

3. But we must farther observe, that when God does thus harden men in ruinous counsels, on purpose to punish or to destroy them, he does nothing which has either any natural or moral efficacy to harden them ; but by their own wickedness they abuse the providence of God to harden themselves. This I have particularly shown in the case of Pharaoh ; those signs and wonders which God wrought in Egypt, and that undeniable proof that they were sent by God, in that they were inflicted and removed at the word of Moses, and the goodness of God in removing one judgment after another at his request, would have convinced and softened other men, but hardened him.

St. Paul tells us, that the natural end and use of God's patience and long-suffering is to lead us to repentance ; and therefore when it hardens some men in sinful and destructive courses, as we too often see it does, there is no reason to charge this on the patience of God, but on the wickedness of men.

God permitted a lying spirit to enter into Ahab's prophets to persuade him to go against Ramoth-Gilead ; and though God might very justly have left him in the hands of those false prophets of his own making and choosing, yet he sends his own prophet, Micaiah, whom all Israel knew to be the Lord's prophet, to assure him, that if he went against Ramoth-Gilead, he should perish there. And therefore, God did not deceive Ahab, but he deceived himself, by preferring the prophets of Baal before the Lord's prophet, which was owing to his own wicked, idolatrous heart.

God never deceives or hardens any men by the external events and appearances of providence, but those whose own lusts and wicked hearts deceive and harden them. There is always enough, even in those providences which men abuse to harden themselves, to have reclaimed and softened them, if they would have made a wise use of it. And when men have sinned themselves into such a hardened state as to forfeit the protection of providence, God may do what is wise, and just, and holy, though he knows that they will abuse it to their own ruin, and intends to bring ruin on them by it. And it is a glorious vindication of the wisdom, and goodness, and holiness of God, when all the

world shall see, that such men's ruin is wholly owing to themselves, to their wicked abuse of all those wise and gracious methods which would have reclaimed and saved them, if they would have been reclaimed and saved.

4. To understand the full and comprehensive notion of God's hardening men, we must observe farther, that when God has been so far provoked as to resolve the final destruction of any person, or people, he many times inflicts on them a judicial blindness and infatuation, which betrays them to such foolish counsels as must inevitably prove their ruin. That God many times does this, the Scripture witnesseth—"He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools. He removeth away the speech of the trusty," (in whose counsels men used to confide,) "and taketh away the understanding of the aged. He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness, where there is no way." That is, entangles and perplexes their counsels. "They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man:" to reel from one resolution to another, in great uncertainty what to do: Job xii. 17, 20, 24, 25. Thus Isaiah xix. 11, 12, 13, 14: "Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish. How say ye unto Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings? Where are they? where are thy wise men? and let them tell thee now, and let them know what the Lord of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt. The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also seduced Egypt, even they that are the stay of the tribes thereof. The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof, and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit."

We have a plain example of this in Absalom, whom God resolved to punish for his rebellion against David, his king and father. David had prayed that God would turn "the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness," and accordingly God so ordered it as to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel by the advice of Hushai. And the reason of it is given: "for the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahi-

thophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom." 2 Sam. xvii. 14.

This makes men as hard as they are blind: they mistake their true interest, flatter themselves with vain hopes, run themselves into the most apparent and inevitable dangers, without seeing them themselves, though everybody else sees them. And something of this nature we must own in Pharaoh's case; for without such an infatuation, it is impossible to conceive that he should have persisted so long in his resolution not to part with Israel, though it were to the utter ruin and desolation of his country, much less that he should have pursued them into the Red Sea, whose fluid walls threatened him with immediate destruction.

And this I take to be the blindness which God threatens against Judah. Isaiah vi. 9, 10: "Go and tell this people,—hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed." For here is a double blindness taken notice of in the text—one which they brought upon themselves, another which God threatens to inflict on them. "They did hear, but not understand; they did see, but not perceive:" that is, they stop their own ears, and shut their own eyes, against all the admonitions and reproofs of God's prophets; for thus our Saviour expounds it, as their own act, and wilful, voluntary blindness. Matt. xiii. 14, 15. "And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah," (for a prophecy it was, as it concerned the Jews in our Saviour's days, though it was a description of the actual deafness and blindness of the Jews in the prophet's days,) "which saith, by hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. And thus St. Paul represents it, Acts xxviii. 26, 27.

This is their sinful blindness and deafness, which is

wholly owing to themselves, and for the punishment of which God threatens them with a penal and judicial blindness. For when God commands the prophet "to make their heart fat, and their ears heavy, and to shut their eyes," it can signify nothing else but his passing a final decree and sentence of blindness and deafness on them: not such a blindness as should betray them to and harden them in sin; (God may leave men in such a state of blindness, when they have wilfully blinded and hardened themselves, but he never inflicts it,) but such a blindness as would betray them into that ruin and destruction which God has so justly decreed for them. For this blindness and deafness which were inflicted on them in the prophet's days, were in order to their captivity in Babylon, and the destruction of their city and temple by the Chaldeans: that, in our Saviour's days, was in order to their final destruction by the Romans. And our Saviour tells us what kind of blindness was inflicted on them; that the "things belonging to their peace," which would preserve their nation from being destroyed, "were now hid from their eyes:" Luke xix.42. And the story verifies this; for certainly never was there a greater infatuation upon any people, than upon the Jews at both times, who forced both the Chaldeans and Romans to destroy them, whether they would or not, and when they intended no such thing. And many examples there are of such a judicial blindness and infatuation in every age of the world. There are seldom any great and remarkable calamities which befall any persons, especially nations, but by-standers see how they undo themselves by their own stupid wilfulness and folly, as has been long since observed:—*Quos perdere vult Jupiter, prius dementat:* "that God first blinds and infatuates those whom he intends to destroy." And this is what the Scripture means by hardening men's hearts, and blinding their eyes, as I hope appears from what I have now discoursed; and no man has any reason to quarrel either with the justice or holiness of God upon this account. But we have all great reason to take warning by these examples, lest we provoke God so long by our sins, by our own wilful blindness and hardness, that he inflict this judicial blindness on us, that he shut our eyes not to see the

things that belong to our peace; of which we have so many sad symptoms already among us, that it is time to take warning. Nothing can be more just, than for God to harden those men to their own ruin, who harden themselves against his fear. So to blind those who will not see nor regard their duty, as to mistake their interest too. And the only way to prevent such a judicial hardness and infatuation, is to reverence God, to have a respect to all his commandments: in the first place to take care of our duty, and then to commit our ways unto the Lord, in a secure dependence on his providence.

There are several other texts of Scripture alleged to this purpose, to charge God with the sins of men; but they will receive a shorter answer—as:

2. Those texts which ascribe what is done by the sins of men to God's doing. But the answer to this is plain; for God can and does bring to pass a great many wise and holy designs by the sins of men, without being the author of their sins; and it is only the event which is attributed to God, not the sin whereby such events are brought to pass. This will appear at the first view, by considering some of these texts.

Joseph's brethren sold him to the Ishmaelites, who carried him into Egypt, where God advanced him to Pharaoh's throne. Joseph tells his brethren, that though they sold him, it was God that sent him before them into Egypt, to preserve their lives:—"So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God:" Gen. xlv. 5, 7, 8. Joseph does not say that it was from God that his brethren sold him: this was their own act, and all the wickedness of it was their own; but it was God who sent him into Egypt, which his brethren never thought of, nor intended, their only concern being to get rid of him: and when God did that, which they never intended to do, that may well be said to be God's doings, who permitted their wickedness, and made use of it to accomplish his own wise counsels; as he tells his brethren—"As for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day to save much people alive:" Gen. l. 20.

When Job was plundered by the Sabeans and Chaldeans,

he attributes it to God:—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away:" Job i. 21. And so must all men say, who believe a providence, that all the good or evil that happens to us in this world, whoever be the immediate instruments of it, is ordered and disposed by God. But Job does not, therefore, attribute the wickedness of the Sabeans and Chaldeans to God; as if God could not govern and overrule the wickedness of men and devils, without being the author of their wickedness.

When David had committed that great sin, in defiling Uriah's wife, and contriving his murder, God threatens him by the prophet Nathan, "I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun;" 2 Sam. xii. 11, 12; which we know Absalom accordingly did, by the advice of Ahithophel: chap. xvi. 20, &c.

Now that God did inflict this punishment upon David is plain from the text; but that he either instigated Ahithophel to give this counsel, or Absalom to take it, is not said; and if God could inflict this punishment on David without having any hand in the sin, it is no reflection on the holiness of providence. All that God expressly says he would do in the case was to put David's wives into Absalom's power; "I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour;" and then foretells what the effect of this would be, and what he intended to permit for his punishment; "he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun." There was no evil in so ordering the matter, that when David fled he should leave his wives behind him, which put them in Absalom's power; and then God foresaw what counsel Ahithophel would give, and how ready Absalom would be to take it, unless he hindered it, which he decreed not to do in punishment of David's adultery. And thus to order the permission for such an end, though it has nothing of the guilt of the sin, yet entitles God to the event, considered as a punishment; upon which account God may be said to "do this before all Israel, and before the sun."

Thus when Shimei cursed David, as he fled from Jerusalem, David takes notice of God's hand in it, and would not suffer Abishai to cut him off; "let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, curse David:" 2 Sam. xvi. 10. But every one sees that this must be a figurative expression, for it is not true in the literal sense. God never commanded Shimei to curse David, nor did David believe in a literal sense that he did, for then he would not have imputed the guilt of it to him. Whereas, we know, though he had sworn to Shimei at his return, when he came to meet him, that he would not put him to death, yet he left it in his dying charge to Solomon, "not to hold him guiltless:" 1 Kings ii. 8, 9. But when David said, "the Lord hath bidden him curse," all that he meant by it, or could mean by it, is no more but this, that the sad calamity which the providence of God had brought on him by the rebellion of his son Absalom, had given free scope to Shimei's old and inveterate hatred of him, and as effectually let loose his reviling tongue as if God had in express words commanded him to curse David; and therefore he patiently submits to this as part of his punishment, and a very inconsiderable part when compared with the rebellion of his son Absalom, which gave this confidence to Shimei to curse his king. "Behold my son, which come forth of my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more now may this Benjamite do it?" v. 10. This is no more than what David elsewhere complains of, that God had made him the song of the drunkards. For bad men will take all the advantages which the providence of God gives them, to reproach, and scorn, and persecute the good. There needs no other command for this, but a fair opportunity to do it.

Some object God's giving power to Satan, first over the goods, and then over the body of Job, excepting his life. And God's permitting a lying spirit to enter into Ahab's prophets to persuade him to go up to Ramoth-Gilead. But wherein the objection lies, I cannot tell; for I suppose that they will not say that God, by permitting the devil to hurt and to deceive, made him a malicious and lying spirit. Those are very unreasonable objectors, who will not allow God to make use of the ministry of wicked spirits to wise and good ends, without charging him with their sins too.

But God himself tells us, that when a prophet is deceived, he hath deceived him; now how is it reconcilable with the holiness of his nature or providence to deceive? Ezek. xiv. 9: "And if the prophet be deceived, when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel."

Now to this it is commonly answered, that God permits a lying spirit to possess such prophets, as he did in the case of Ahab; for he only speaks here of the prophets of Baal, such prophets as he would cut off for their lying prophecies; and how does it unbecome God to give up the worshippers of evil spirits, their priests and prophets, to be inspired and deceived by them? No true worshipper of God was under any temptation to be deceived by them, because they were not the prophets of God; and God had always his own prophet among them, to warn them against such lying prophecies; nay, it was the fault of these prophets, that they were deceived themselves; for they did know that they did not receive their prophecies from the Lord, but from the heathen idols, or that they were their own inventions; and when they chose to worship strange gods, and to consult their oracles, or to divine out of their own hearts, they chose to be deceived; and therefore God threatens—"They shall bear the punishment of their iniquity; the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him:" Ezek. xiv. 10. We have a large account of these prophets, and severe judgments denounced against them, Ezek. xiii., who are said "to prophesy out of their own hearts," and to "follow their own spirits," when they "had seen nothing;" to "see a vain vision," and "speak a lying divination;" and sometimes to attribute it to God too, they say: "The Lord seeth it, albeit I have not spoken."

Now this character the prophet Ezekiel gives of these lying prophets, inclines me to a very different sense of these words, which seems plain and easy; not that God deceived them to prophesy lies, but that God deceived them in the event: they deceived themselves into "vain visions;" either by giving themselves over to idolatry, which betrayed them

to the delusions of wicked spirits; or by heating their imaginations into enthusiastic frenzies, and prophesying their own hopes and politic guesses, which is called, "prophesying out of their own hearts," and "following their own spirits;" and then God deceived all their hopes and expectations, by bringing those evils on them, which they with great assurance and confidence said, should never come. And the words plainly favour this sense: God does not say, "If a prophet be deceived to speak a thing, I the Lord have deceived him;" but "if a prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing"—that is, if the event does not answer his prediction—"I have deceived him," or confuted his vain, lying prophecy. And how would God deceive him? That immediately follows, "I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel: and they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity," both prophets and people. This did effectually deceive them, as being a terrible confutation of their prophecies, and what God expressly threatened: "Because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace, and there was no peace:" Ezek. xiii. 8—10. This is what God attributes to himself, as his peculiar prerogative and glory, that it is "He that frustrateth the tokens of the seers, and maketh diviners mad;" by deceiving them in the events of things, and confuting their prophecies by his judgments; Isaiah xliv. 25; as he expressly threatened against these lying prophets and diviners; Micah iii. 5—7, which is a plain comment upon this text.

As for what is objected about David's numbering the people, it is hardly worth naming; 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, it is said, "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, to say, Go, number the people." But in 1 Chron. xxi. 1, it is expressly said, "That Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." From whence we learn in what sense this is attributed to God, when Satan was the immediate tempter; only because God, in anger against Israel, suffered Satan to tempt David to number them.

But that is more considerable that is objected from St. Paul concerning the heathens, whom God delivered up to all manner of wickedness, in punishment of their idolatry.

"They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things; wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves——And for this cause God gave them up to vile affections——And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient, being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, &c." Now is not this a reflection on the holiness of God, that because men are guilty of one sin, he delivers them up to all other sins? For can a holy God punish sin with sin? Can he, who hates all wickedness, contribute any thing to make men more wicked than otherwise they would be?

But in answer to this, we need only consider what is meant by God's "giving them up to all uncleanness," and "to a reprobate mind;" which signifies no positive act of God, but only his leaving them in the power and management of those evil spirits whom they idolatrously worshipped. For most of these vices to which God is said to give them up, were the necessary effects of their idolatry—were the sacred rites and mysteries of their religious worship; and if they would worship such gods, they must worship them as they would be worshipped. And this corrupted the lives and manners of men, and destroyed all the notions of good and evil, and then they were prepared for any wickedness which their own vicious inclinations and the circumstances of their condition and fortune, or those wicked spirits, could tempt them to. This very account we find in the book of Wisdom, where we have such another catalogue of vices as the apostle here gives us, charged upon their idolatry, as the natural effects of it: Wisdom xiv. 22, &c.

Now if men will worship such gods as delight in uncleanness and impurity, and all manner of wickedness, and who will be worshipped with the most infamous vices, to the utmost reproach and contempt of human nature, there is no avoiding it, but that their religion must corrupt their lives:

they give themselves up to the worship of evil spirits, and God leaves them in their hands; for who should have the government of them, but the gods they worship? They reproach the Divine nature by vile and sensible representations, and God gives them up to vile affections, to dishonour their own natures. They corrupt the natural notions they have of God, and God gives them up to a reprobate mind, not to distinguish between good and evil.

The devil had erected a kingdom of darkness in the world, and God thought fit for some time to permit it, till he sent his own Son "to destroy the works of the devil;" and those who gave themselves up to idolatry became his slaves and vassals, for he is "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that ruleth in the children of disobedience." And this is God's giving them up to vile affections, his casting them out of his protection, when they had first renounced him, and giving them up to the power of wicked spirits, to whom they had given themselves.

So that here is no other objection against the holiness of God, but that there is a devil who is a very impure spirit, and affects Divine honours to be "the god of this world;" and that God suffers him to govern those who worship him, and to seduce them into all the wickedness of a diabolical nature. And yet that barbarous tyranny which the devil exercised over his votaries; that impure, flagitious worship which he instituted, and that excess of wickedness wherewith he corrupted the lives of men was the most effectual way to convince mankind what sort of gods they worshipped, and did make the wiser heathens ashamed of their gods and of their worship; and as learning and civility increased, they reformed their worship, and allegorized away their gods, which disposed them for the more ready reception of that holy religion which the Son of God preached to the world. Wickedness is its own punishment, and many times proves its own cure; and God could not have inflicted a more just punishment upon the idolatrous world than to deliver them up to the tyranny of those wicked spirits whom they worshipped; and there was not a more likely way to convince men of their fatal error than those inhuman and impious rites of worship, and that excess of wickedness

which their idolatry betrayed them to, which was enough to make human nature start and fly back.

The like objection is made from the antichristian state; the appearance of the man of sin, "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved: and for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness:" 2 Thess. ii. 9—12.

Now what can be more just than this, for God to suffer the devil to blind those men who will not see? To deceive those "with signs and lying wonders, and all deceivableness of unrighteousness," who "do not love the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness;" who endeavour to deceive themselves, and desire to be deceived. For this is all that is meant by "sending them strong delusions to believe a lie;" that God suffers the man of sin to erect his kingdom, "after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders." When men are in love with their sins, and therefore do not love the truth because it discovers and reproves their sins, they are out of the protection of God's grace, and are delivered up to the cheats and impostures of crafty men, or of wicked spirits. This is the rule and method of God's grace; he forces truth on no man, but those who love the truth shall find it. Those "who cry after knowledge, and lift up their voice for understanding; who seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures; they shall understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God:" Prov. ii. 2—5. But if men wilfully shut their own eyes against the light, God suffers the "god of this world" to blind them, as St. Paul teaches; 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid in them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Which should make us all afraid of prejudice and the love of this world, which bar up

the mind against truth, and by degrees betray us to a judicial blindness.

There are some other texts which do indeed attribute the supreme disposal of all human actions to God, but without charging his providence with men's sins. Prov. xvi. 9: "A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps." xix. 21: "There are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord that shall stand." xx. 24: "Man's goings are of the Lord—how then can a man understand his own ways?" The meaning of which is, that men advise, and deliberate, and choose freely, what they intend to do, but when they come to action, they can do nothing, they can bring nothing to pass, but what God will. God can change their counsels, or can disappoint them when they are ripe for action, or can make what they do serve quite another end than what they intended. Now this only proves what I have already observed, that the issues and events of all things are in God's hands, as they must be, if he governs the world. Men may choose what they please, but they shall do only what God sees fit, and what he orders for wise ends. God does not act immediately, but makes use of natural causes, or of the ministries of men, both good and bad men. Men choose and act freely, and pursue their own designs and imaginations, and therefore the moral good or evil of the action is their own; and God does as freely, with unsearchable wisdom, overrule all events, which are therefore God's doing as well as men's, being directed by him to serve the wise ends of providence, in rewarding or punishing men or nations as they deserve.

Thus I have, as briefly as I could, examined most of those texts which have been thought to attribute to God some kind of causality and efficiency in the sins of men; and I hope have made it appear, that there is no such thing intended in them. And for the conclusion of this argument concerning the holiness of providence, I shall only add some few practical inferences by way of application.

1. Not to attribute our own or other men's sins to God. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn

away of his own lust, and enticed:" Jas. i. 13, 14. This is absolutely necessary to be observed; for without it there is an end of all religion. If God can influence men's minds to wicked purposes and counsels, it is impossible he should hate wickedness, or be so holy as many holy men are, who would no more incline or tempt other men to sin than they would sin themselves. And who will hate sin, or think that God will love him ever the less for being a sinner, who believes this? If God wants the sins of men to accomplish his own counsels, they must either be very unholy counsels, which cannot be accomplished without the sins of men, or he must be a weak or unskilful being, which is downright blasphemy; for a wise and powerful being can do whatever is wise and holy, without the sins of men. It is excellent wisdom indeed, when men do and will sin, for God to accomplish his own wise and gracious counsels by their sins; but to incline, or tempt, or overrule, or determine men to sin, on purpose to serve himself by their sins, this would be a just impeachment, both of his holiness, his wisdom, and his power; and a God, who is neither holy, wise, nor powerful, would be no very fit object of religious worship.

To say that God decrees the sins of men for his own glory, to magnify his mercy and justice, in saving some few, and in condemning the greatest part of mankind to eternal miseries, is so senseless a representation both of the glory, of the mercy, and of the justice of God, as destroys the very notion of all.

For if man be a mere machine, who moves as he is moved, how can he deserve either well or ill? Necessity destroys the very notion of virtue or vice, both of which suppose a free choice and election; and if there be no virtue nor vice, there can be no rewards nor punishments; and then there is no place either for justice or mercy; and then God can neither glorify his mercy, nor his justice in forgiving sins, or in punishing the sinner. How can any man who believes that he is overruled by God to do all the evil he does, ever be a true penitent, or heartily beg God's pardon, or reverence his judgments, or endeavour to do better? All religion is founded in this persuasion, that God

hates every thing that is wicked; for if there be no essential difference between good and evil, there is no pretence for religion; and if God makes none, there is none; and if he can be the author of what is evil as well as of what is good, he makes no difference between them.

2. The holiness of providence teacheth us never to do any evil to serve providence, under pretext of doing some great good by it, which we think may be acceptable to God. God never needs the sins of men, and can never approve them, whatever good ends they are intended to serve. God indeed does many times bring good out of evil, but he allows no man "to do evil, that good may come." This St. Paul rejects with the greatest abhorrence, and tells us that such men's "damnation is just," (Rom. iii. 8:) for it is the greatest contradiction in the world to do evil in order to do good; for how can a man, who can for any reason be persuaded to do evil, be a hearty and zealous lover of goodness? It is certain that he who does any evil, does not heartily love that goodness to which the evil he does is opposed; and he who does not heartily love all goodness, is a hearty lover of none: there is no reconciling good and evil, no more than you can reconcile contradictions; a good man will love and do that which is good, and an evil man will do that which is evil; and though the Divine wisdom can bring good out of evil, yet evil is not, and cannot be the cause of good, no more than darkness can be the natural cause of light; and therefore a good design can never justify a bad action: for that bad actions should do good, is contrary to the nature of bad actions; and whatever men may intend, I am sure that no man can alter the nature of things, and therefore can never justify himself in doing evil that good may come.

It is certain a wise and holy God requires no such thing of us; and though he very often brings about great and admirable designs by men's sins, yet no man knows how to do it, nor knows when God will do it; nor did ever any man who ventured upon sin in order to do some greater good, ever do the good he intended, though many times he runs himself into more and greater sins than ever he intended.

Nay, I dare boldly say that no man ever deliberately ventured upon a known sin to do some greater good by it, but there was always some base worldly interest at the bottom, coloured over with a pretence of doing good, either to deceive the world or sometimes to deceive their own consciences. The church of Rome, among whom there are those who teach and practise this doctrine, are an undeniable example of it, and we have had too many sad examples of it nearer home.

This seems to me one reason why those prophecies which concern future ages are generally so obscure that no man knows when or how they shall be fulfilled, that no man may be tempted to any sin to serve providence, and to fulfil prophecies. As obscure as these prophecies are, yet we see some heated enthusiasts very forward to venture on any thing to fulfil prophecies, to pull down Antichrist, to set up the kingdom of Christ, especially when they hope to set up themselves with him: but God conceals times and seasons from us; and though he many times fulfils prophecies by the sins of men, yet he allows no man to sin to fulfil prophecies; and therefore never lets us know when nor by what means prophecies shall be fulfilled. Let us lay down this as a certain principle, that God needs not our sins; and that we can never please him by doing evil, whatever the event be: he makes use of the sins of men to serve his providence, but he will punish them for their sins.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GOODNESS OF PROVIDENCE.

The next inquiry is concerning the goodness of providence: though methinks it is a more proper subject for our devout meditations than for our inquiries; for we need not look far to seek for proofs and demonstrations of the Divine goodness. "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord:" we see, and feel, and taste it every day; we owe our being,

our preservation, and all the comforts of our lives to it. There is not so mean nor so miserable a creature in this world, but can bear its testimony to the Divine goodness: nay, if you would pardon the harshness of the expression, I would venture to say that the goodness of God is one of the greatest plagues and torments of hell; I mean the remembrance of God's goodness, and their wicked and ungrateful abuse of it. This is that worm that never dieth, those sharp reflections men make on their ingratitude and folly, in making themselves miserable by affronting that goodness which would have made them happy.

Whatever other objections some wanton and sporting wits make against providence, one would think it impossible that any man who lives in this world and feels what he enjoys himself, and sees what a bountiful provision is made for all creatures, should question the goodness of providence by which "he lives, moves, and has his being." We should think him an extraordinary benefactor who did the thousandth part for us of what God does; and should not challenge his goodness, though he did some things which we did not like, or did not understand; but atheism is founded in ingratitude; and unless God humour them, as well as do them good, he is no God for them. Nay, I cannot but observe here the perverse as well as the ungrateful temper of atheists; when they dispute against the justice of providence, then God is much too good for them; though he gives us examples enough of his severity against sin, yet his patience and long-suffering to some few prosperous sinners is thought a sufficient argument that God is not just, or that he does not govern the world. When they dispute against the goodness of providence, then God is not good enough for them: though they see innumerable instances of goodness in the government of the world, yet this is not owing to a good God, but to good fortune, because they think they see some of the careless and irregular strokes of chance and fortune intermixed with it in the many evils and calamities of life. Now it is impossible for God himself to answer these two objections to the satisfaction of these men; and that I think is a sufficient answer to them both. For should God vindicate his justice to the satisfaction of these

men, by punishing in this world every sin that is committed according to its desert, there would be very little room for the exercise of goodness: if every man must suffer as much as he sins, the very best men will be great sufferers; much greater sufferers than any of them now are, though their sufferings are made another objection against providence; and there will be as many formidable examples of misery, as there are atheists and profligate sinners, and this would be an unanswerable objection against the goodness of providence; for, how good soever God might be, if he must punish every sin, he has no opportunity to show his goodness. And, on the other hand, should God be as these men would have him; that is, that to prove himself good he should not inflict any evils or calamities on men, whatever their sins or provocations are; that, whereas God planted paradise only for man in innocence, the whole world should be now a paradise, though there is not an innocent man in it; this would be as unanswerable an objection against the justice of providence: so that these men have taken care always to have an objection against providence; for according to their notions of justice and goodness, God cannot be both; which is a certain demonstration that they mistake the true notion of justice and goodness; they are both great and excellent virtues; both are essential to the idea of God; both are necessary to the good government of the world; and therefore both of them must be very consistent and reconcilable with each other, both in notion and practice.

I have already vindicated the justice of God's providence; and there is no great difficulty in vindicating his goodness, the objections against which are founded in plain and evident mistakes, and therefore will receive an easy answer. And I shall first consider what the mistakes are, and then particularly answer the objections.

1. As for the first, the mistakes either relate to the nature of God's goodness, or to the nature of good and evil, or to the goodness of providence and government.

1. The mistake concerning God's goodness: and the fundamental mistake is this, that men consider the goodness of God absolutely without relation to the nature, quality, or

desert of the subjects who are to receive good. They contemplate goodness in its abstracted idea and notion; and whatever they conceive belongs to the most perfect goodness that they expect from God in the government of this world; and if they do not find it, they conclude that the world is not governed by a good providence. As for instance—

It is certainly an act of the most perfect goodness to make all creatures happy; not to suffer any miseries to enter into the world: that there be nothing to deface the beauty, or to disturb the harmony of it; no lamentable sights nor doleful complaints to move our pity, nor to terrify us with the melancholy presages of our own sufferings, nor to make frightful impressions on us of a severe and inexorable deity. Could they see such a world as this they would thankfully own the Divine goodness, and securely rejoice in it. But this world wherein we live gives us a very different prospect; we see a great many miserable people, and feel a great many miseries ourselves, and many times expect and fear a great many more. And how unlike is this world to what we should have imagined the world to have been had we never seen it, but only heard of a world made and governed by infinite and perfect goodness? Indeed, all the objections against the goodness of providence do ultimately resolve into this: that the world is not so happy as a good God can make it, and therefore a good providence does not govern the world, and a plain answer to this will enable any man to answer all the rest.

And the answer to this is short and plain: that infinite and perfect goodness will do all the good which can be wisely done, but not all the good which men may expect from infinite goodness. For the external exercise of goodness must not bear proportion to the infinite fulness of the Divine nature, but to the state, condition, and capacities of creatures; and therefore we must not measure the goodness of providence merely by external events, which may sometimes be very calamitous, but by that proportion such events bear to the state and deserts of mankind, or of particular men in this world. The best man in the world does not think himself bound to do all the good he can to every one

he meets; he will make a difference between a child and a servant, between a friend and an enemy, between a good and a bad man, and much more must a good prince and a good magistrate do so, and much more must God, who is the supreme and sovereign Lord of the world.

We shall better understand this, if we view man in his several states, and observe how the Divine goodness suits itself to those different states.

The Divine goodness made the world and made man; and hence we may take our estimate what the goodness of God is, and what it can and will do when goodness freely exerts itself, without any external impediment to set bounds to it.

And if we believe the history of the creation, the Divine goodness displayed itself in a most beautiful and glorious scene. The new-made world, and the new-created man, were as perfect and happy as the perfect ideas of their natures in the Divine mind. This was the world which God made; such a happy world as it became perfect goodness to make; and hence we learn what the goodness of God is, and what it would always do; for when the Divine goodness made the world, he made it what he would have it be.

But man did not continue what God had made him. He sinned, and by sin brought death and misery into the world. And, therefore, though we do not now see such a happy state of things, we must not hence conclude that the world is not governed by perfect goodness; but that a perfect state of ease and happiness in this world does neither become the providence of God, nor is good for sinners; and we have reason to conclude this, not only because God made innocent man happy, but because he has prepared a much greater happiness for good men in the next world: which shows that the change is not in God, but in men. He made man happy at first, and he will make good men perfectly happy hereafter. But though he be always the same, as good now as he was when he first made the world, and as he will be when he shall reward all good men in the resurrection of the just; yet the degenerate state of mankind requires such a mixture of good and evil as we now see, and feel, and complain of in this world.

For it is a very different case to see goodness acting alone, and pursuing its own gracious inclinations, and to see it limited and confined by justice, which must be the case when mankind are sinners. For then goodness cannot do what is absolutely best, but what is best in such cases; and when goodness and justice are reconcilable, as they are in a probation state, there wisdom must prescribe the temperament.

Justice requires the punishment of sinners, but goodness is inclined to spare; and wisdom judges when and in what manner it is fit to punish or to spare. An incurable sinner is the object of strict and rigorous justice; a corrigible sinner is the object both of justice and goodness; his sin deserves correction and punishment; but that he is corrigible makes him the object of patience and discipline. And this we must suppose to be the difference between the case of apostate angels and of fallen man, and therefore justice immediately seized on those apostate spirits; but God in infinite goodness promised a Saviour to mankind.

This makes the present state of mankind in this world to be a state of trial and discipline—to reclaim and reform sinners by the various methods of grace and providence; and this changes both the very notion and exercises of God's goodness and justice in this world; for we must expect no more of either than what a state of trial and discipline will allow.

The not considering this distinction between absolute goodness and justice, and the goodness and justice of discipline, has been the occasion of all those objections which have been made both against the goodness and justice of providence.

We must confess that the world is not so happy as perfect, and absolute, and unconfined goodness could make it. Nor are all sinners so miserable as strict and absolute justice could make them. But this signifies no more than that heaven and hell are not in this world, as no man ever pretended they were. And yet strict and rigorous justice, and perfect and absolute goodness, wherever they are exercised, must make hell and heaven. But this life is a middle state between both, and as men behave themselves here, so they

shall have their portions either in heaven or hell: and therefore the goodness and justice of God in this world is of a different nature from that goodness or justice which is exercised in heaven or hell, proportioned to the state of discipline and trial in this life.

Goodness indeed has the predominant government, and justice is only the minister of goodness in this world, as it must be in a state of discipline, when corrections as well as favours are intended for good. To put man in a state of probation and trial to recover that immortality he had lost, was an act of great goodness; and whatever severe methods are used to reform sinners, is as great an expression of goodness as it is to force and to compel them to be happy; as it is to cut off a hand or a leg to preserve life. And if we will allow this world to be a state of trial and discipline for another world, and wisely consider, not what pure, simple, and absolute goodness, but what the goodness of discipline, requires, it will give us an easy answer to all the objections against the goodness of providence.

(1.) As first, the goodness of God in a state of discipline will not admit of a complete and perfect happiness in this world; for that is no state of discipline. Good men themselves, were they as happy in this world as they could wish, would not be very fond of another world, nor learn those mortifying and self-denying virtues which are necessary to prepare them for a spiritual life: and bad men would grow more in love with this world, and sin on without check or control: the miseries and afflictions of this life wean good men from this world, and lay great restraints upon bad men; which justifies both the wisdom and goodness of God in those many miseries which mankind suffer.

(2.) But yet the goodness of God, in a state of discipline, requires that this world should be so tolerable a place as to make life desirable; his own glory is concerned in this; for no man would believe that the world was made, or is governed by a good God, were there no visible and sensible testimonies of a kind and good providence: but though God cursed the earth for the sin of man, yet he has not defaced the characters of his own wisdom and goodness, but still "the invisible things of God, from the creation of the

world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead," Rom. i. 20; and in the most degenerate state of mankind, "God left not himself without a witness, giving them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness." What dreadful apprehensions would this give mankind of God, were this world nothing else but a scene of trouble and misery? What encouragement would this be to sinners to repent and reform? What hopes could they reasonably conceive of pardon and forgiveness, had they no experience of God's goodness and patience towards sinners? What place would there be for the exercise of moral or Christian virtues, of faith, and hope, and trust in God, of self-denial, and a contempt of this world, were not this world a very tolerably happy place, though a changeable scene? A state of discipline must neither be a state of perfect happiness, nor misery, but an interchangeable scene of very agreeable pleasures and tolerable evils, sufficient to exercise the virtues, and to correct the vices of mankind: and this I take the state of this life to be; so happy, that few men are so miserable as to be weary of it; and yet so intermixed with troubles, as to exercise the virtues of good men, and to correct the wicked: and this is what becomes the goodness of God to do for us in a state of discipline.

(3.) The goodness of God seems to require, that in such a mixed and changeable scene, there should be some remarkable difference made between the good and the bad; for the design of Providence, in a state of trial, is to encourage virtue, and to deter men from sin; and, therefore, there ought to be such a visible difference made as may be sufficient, if men will wisely consider things, to encourage good men, and to restrain the wicked.

I do not mean that all good men should be happy and prosperous, and all bad men miserable, as to their external fortune; for a state of discipline will not allow this; all good men cannot bear a prosperous fortune, and some bad men may grow better by it, or may be fit instruments of Providence; and such a visible distinction between all good and bad men belongs to the day of judgment, not to a state of trial, and therefore we see this is not done; and bad

men, who have the least reason to complain of it, make it an objection against providence.

But though providence many times seems to make little difference between good and bad men, as to external events, yet God very often takes care to expound his providences, which makes a very sensible difference between them.

Natural conscience is one of God's interpreters of providence, which terrifies bad men with a sense of guilt, when they suffer, and threatens them with a more terrible vengeance, but supports good men under their sufferings with better hopes; that bad men suffer like malefactors, with rage, and fear, and despair; good men with patience, and submission, and joyful expectations of a reward.

All the promises of Scripture are made to good men; and all the threatenings of it denounced against bad men; and this expounds providence; for this assures good men that all the good they receive is the effect of God's care and goodness to them; and that the evils they suffer are either his fatherly correction, or the trial and exercise of their virtues; but that the prosperity of bad men is only the effect of God's patience, or to make them instruments of his providence; and that their sufferings are the punishment of their sins, and the forerunners of future vengeance, except they repent. And when we know this, it makes a vast difference between the prosperity and the sufferings of good and bad men; and because this is not always visible in external events, God has taken care to reveal it to us.

But God has made this very visible in most of the ordinary calamities of life, which are the natural effects of sin; of intemperance, luxury, lust, pride, passion, covetousness, idleness, and prodigality; most of those evils which bad men suffer, are owing to such vices, and all these good men escape; and sometimes their virtues advance them to riches and honours, and when they do not, yet they make them contented and pleased: but when wickedness makes men great, it commonly makes them a mark for envy, and advances them to tumble them down.

Nay, though the Divine providence does not always make a difference between good and bad men, as to their external fortunes, yet sometimes God makes a very remarkable

difference between them: gives such signal demonstrations of his anger against bad men, and of his care and protection of the good, that it forces men to acknowledge—"Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth:" Ps. lviii. 11. And a few such examples as these (though both sacred and profane story furnish us with very many) are sufficient to make as visible a distinction between the good and the bad, as the providence of God in this world requires.

(4.) But yet the goodness of providence, in a state of discipline, will not allow of greater evils and calamities than are necessary to the good government of the world: for this is a state of discipline and government, not of judgment. Good men must suffer no more than what will increase their virtue, not prove a temptation to sin: "The rod of the wicked must not always rest on the lot of the righteous, lest he also put forth his hand unto iniquity." The sufferings of bad men, who are in a curable state, must be only proportioned to their cure, unless the evil of the example requires a severer punishment to warn other sinners. As for hardened and incorrigible sinners, the goodness of God is not concerned for them, but he may serve his providence on them as he pleases; either by making them the ministers of his justice, to execute such a terrible vengeance on the world as none but such hardened sinners would execute; or by making them the lasting monuments of his own vengeance, as he did a hardened and incorrigible Pharaoh: for this is for the great good of the world, and a state of discipline requires such examples; and such sinners are fit to be made examples of: and all such severities as these are very reconcilable with the goodness of God in a state of discipline.

(5.) The goodness of God in a state of discipline not only allows but requires great patience, long-suffering, and goodness, to sinners: for this is necessary to reclaim sinners, to give them time for repentance, and to invite and encourage them to repent by all the arts and methods of goodness, as well as to overawe them by judgments and severities. Promises are as necessary to reform sinners as threatenings; for hope is as powerful a principle as fear;

and love and goodness work more kindly upon ingenuous minds, and melt those whom judgments cannot bow nor break. Thus a kind parent deals with a prodigal son, tries him with kindness as well as severity; and thus God deals with sinners. He is good to the evil and to the good, and maketh his sun to shine, and his rain to fall, upon the just and upon the unjust: and this is such goodness as is proper only for a state of discipline.

(6.) The goodness of God, even in a state of discipline, requires that there should be a great deal more good than evil in the world; for since goodness governs the world, even in this state, the good must be predominant, that notwithstanding all the evils and calamities there are, it may still be very visible that the world is governed by a good God. That this is so, I think I need not prove, for we all see and feel it. The evils that are in the world bear no proportion at all to the good: there are some few examples of miserable people, but the generality of mankind are very happy; and even these miserable people have great allays of their miseries, and if we take an estimate of their whole lives, have a much greater share of good than evil.

The judgments of God are sometimes very terrible, but they come but seldom: for a year's plague or famine, we enjoy some ages of health and plenty. And the ruins and desolations of war are recompensed and forgot by a more lasting and flourishing peace. But the goodness of God moves in a constant and uniform round, visits all parts and corners of the earth, as the sun does with its light and heat: that considering how little mankind deserve from God in this corrupt and degenerate state, how highly they provoke him every day, and how constantly and universally he does good to them, instead of complaining of the many evils that are in the world, we have reason to admire the patience and goodness of God to sinners.

This I take to be a true account of the nature and exercise of God's goodness, as it respects a state of discipline; and so it must be considered in the government of this world; and then all the objections against the goodness of providence vanish of themselves: though this world be not so happy as perfect and absolute goodness can make it, yet

God abounds in all the expressions of goodness which a state of trial and discipline will allow, which is all that we can reasonably expect, and all that God can wisely do for us in this state.

2. Especially if we consider, in the next place, what the true notion of good and evil is in a state of discipline; for this is another occasion of most objections against the goodness of providence; that men consider human nature absolutely, and appeal to their senses for the notions and differences of good and evil, without any regard to the present state of human nature; that is, by good and evil, they mean only natural good and evil; such as pleasure or pain, a state of ease and rest, or of trouble, and labour, and difficulty, riches or poverty, honour or disgrace, and measure the goodness of providence by the natural good or evil that is in the world; if mankind and particular men be happy and prosperous, then God does good, and they will acknowledge that providence is good; if they be afflicted, this is very evil, and therefore an objection against the goodness of providence. But does not every man know the difference between the good of the end and the good of the means? The end is happiness, which is the good of nature, and therefore whatever is the happiness, or any part of the happiness of man, is the good of nature; the good of the means is that which is good to make men happy; and the more effectual it is to promote our happiness, the greater good it is, though it may be a great natural evil; and whatever will hinder or destroy our happiness is a great evil, though it may be a great natural good. In all such cases, things are good or evil with respect to their end, or to their natural or moral consequences: when we are in health, that is good food which is pleasant and wholesome, and will preserve health; but the same diet may be very hurtful and fatal when we are sick. Indulgence or severity to children is either good or evil, in proportion to their tempers and inclinations, as it is apt either to corrupt their manners, or to train them up to piety and virtue. And therefore, when we speak of discipline and government, which is the true notion of God's providence in this world, we must not consider so much what is naturally good and evil, as what the state of

those is who are the subjects of discipline, and what is good for them in such a state; for how many natural evils soever there are in the world, the evils of afflictions and judgments, of plague, and famine, and sword, if such severities be good for mankind, it is as great an argument of the goodness of providence to inflict them, as it is for a parent, or a prince, to reclaim and reform his children, or his subjects, by great severities: and an easy and prosperous state, when the wickedness of mankind requires severe restraints, is no more an act of kindness and goodness, than the fond indulgence of parents is to disobedient children.

So that this takes away the very foundation of this objection against the goodness of providence. The principal objection is, that there are a great many evils and miseries in the world. We grant it; but then we say, that God is very good in it, and that these natural evils, though they are grievous, are not evils to us, because they are, and are intended, for our good. We can neither prove nor disprove the goodness of providence merely by external events, especially with respect to particular men. For prosperity is not always good for us, nor is affliction always for our hurt; God may make some men prosperous in his anger, and chastise others in great love and goodness; and this I take to be the meaning of the wise man, Eccl. ix. 1, 2: "No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them; for all things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath;" which does not signify that the Divine providence makes no distinction between good and bad men; for God does love good men and hate the wicked, and his providence makes a great difference between them, though this difference is not always visible in external events. For when the same event happens to both, whether it be a natural good or evil, it may be an act of favour to good men, and of judgment to the wicked. For external prosperity or adversity in a state of discipline, may either be good or evil; and may be good for one, when at the same time it is evil to another.

And therefore the providence of God may make a difference, when the external event makes none. The wise man confesses, "this is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all." Bad men, who look no further than external events, make a very bad use of it, and conclude that God makes no difference when they see none made. And thus "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead:" Eccl. ix. 3. But those who consider wisely see no reason from external events, from such a promiscuous distribution of good and evil, either to deny a providence, or the goodness and justice of providence; since good and evil in this state are not the things themselves, but in the end for which they are intended, and which they serve.

It is of great consequence rightly to understand this matter, to give us a firm persuasion of the goodness of God, even when he corrects and punishes, and to cure our discontent at the prosperity of the wicked. And therefore I shall briefly represent to you the state of mankind in this world, and what is good in such a state.

Man has sinned, and man must die. But God has, in his infinite goodness to mankind, sent down his own Son into the world to save sinners, who by death hath destroyed him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and hath brought life and immortality to light by the gospel. This removes the scene of happiness from this world to the next, and makes this present life only a state of probation for eternity. If we obey the laws of our Saviour, and imitate his example, he has promised to raise us again, when our dead bodies are putrefied in the grave, into immortal life. But he has threatened all the miseries of an eternal death against incorrigible sinners; so that the greatest good that God or man can do for us in this world is by all the wise methods of discipline and government, to prepare us for the happiness of the next, and to preserve us from those eternal miseries which will be the portion of sinners. Though there are thousands of foolish sinners who never consider this, yet all mankind agree that that is best for us in this world which will make us eternally happy in the next; and

that is a very great evil which will betray us to eternal miseries. There are a great many infidels who believe neither a heaven nor a hell; but yet these very infidels are not so void of common sense as to deny, supposing there were a heaven and a hell, that to be the best condition for us in this world, whatever it be upon other accounts, which will carry us to heaven, and keep us out of hell.

Now, if this be the case, there cannot be so great evils in this world but what may be good for us, and therefore may be an expression of God's goodness to us. For if pain and sickness, poverty and disgrace, wean us from this world, subdue our lusts, make us good men, and qualify us for eternal rewards, though they are great afflictions, yet they are very good as the way, though a rough and difficult way, to happiness.

That prosperity does sometimes corrupt men's lives and manners, make them proud and sensual, regardless of God and of religion, and so fond of this world that they never care to think of another; and that affliction and adversity has many times a quite contrary effect to make men serious and considerate, to possess them with an awe and reverence of God, to correct and reform bad men, and to exercise the graces and virtues of the good, both the reason of things and the experience of mankind may satisfy us. That this is what God designs in those afflictions and sufferings he brings on mankind, the Scripture everywhere assures us, and the natural conclusion from hence is, that afflictions are not evil, nor any objection against the goodness of providence. If they prove evil to us, it is our own fault, for God designs them for good. As the apostle tells us, "that all things work together for good to them that love God." And "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? but if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons:" Heb. xii. 6—8.

This then must be our great care, to rectify our notions of good and evil, to withdraw our minds from sense, and not to call every thing good that is pleasant, nor every thing

evil that is afflicting. This distinction the heathen poet long since observed, and gives it as a reason, and a very wise and good reason it is, why we should entirely give up ourselves to God, and leave him to choose our condition for us. "*Nam pro jucundis aptissima quæque dabunt Dii.*" "That though God will not always give us those things which are most pleasant, he will give us what is most profitable for us" And if we judge of good and evil, not by sense nor external appearances, but by that spiritual good they do, or are intended to do us, in making us good men here, and happy hereafter; men may, if they so please, as reasonably quarrel with the great ease and prosperity which so many enjoy, as with the afflictions which others suffer. For prosperity does oftener corrupt men's manners, and betray them to sin and folly, than afflictions do. Good men themselves can hardly bear a prosperous state, nor resist the temptations and flatteries of ease and pleasure. Whereas afflictions many times reform bad men, and make good men better, as the Psalmist himself owns: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; for before I was afflicted I went astray, but since, I have learned to keep thy laws." And if both prosperity and adversity may be either for our good or hurt, and when they are so we cannot always tell, we must leave this to God, and commit ourselves to his care and discipline, who knows us better than we know ourselves, and knows what is best for us.

But this may seem to start a new and more difficult objection: that if we must not judge of good and evil by external and sensible events, we can have no sensible proofs of the goodness or justice of providence. As we cannot object the external evils and calamities that are in the world against the goodness of providence, so neither can we prove the goodness of providence from those external and sensible blessings which God bestows upon mankind; so that religion gains nothing by this. It silences indeed the objections against providence; but it also destroys the proofs of a good and just providence. The answer to this objection will give us a truer notion and understanding of the goodness of providence.

For though we cannot know love or hatred merely by

external events, yet this does not destroy the natural good or evil of things, nor the justice or goodness of providence in doing good, or in sending his plagues and judgments on the world. Natural good and evil are the instruments and method of discipline. Good men are encouraged and rewarded in this world by some external and natural blessings; and bad men are restrained and governed by some natural evils; and the goodness and justice of God in doing good and in punishing, make these external blessings and punishments the methods of discipline; which could have no efficacy in them either to encourage good men, or reform the wicked, but as they are the visible significations of God's favour or displeasure. And therefore such external blessings and punishments are evident proofs of the goodness and justice of providence, or else they could not be the methods of discipline, nor have any moral efficacy upon mankind.

But yet when these acts of goodness or justice are made the methods of discipline, and not intended as the proper rewards or punishments of virtue or vice, they are not always confined to good or bad men, and therefore are not certain and visible marks of God's love or hatred.

It is an act of goodness in God to do good to the evil and to the good. To the good, it is a mark of his favour and an incitement to a more perfect virtue; to the evil an expression of his patience, and an invitation to repentance. But when he is good both to the evil and to the good, the mere external event can make no difference. The external good may be the same, and God is good to both, and intends good to both, but yet has not equal favour to both.

It is an act of justice in God to punish, and to correct sin, and both good and bad men many times feel the same severities; to correct and chastise the follies, and to quicken and inflame the devotions of good men; and to overawe and terrify bad men with the sense of God's anger and the fears of vengeance; this is to be just, and to be good to both, as great goodness and justice as it is to reform bad men; and to make good men better, though the external events of providence in such cases make little distinction between them: we see in all these instances manifest proofs

both of the justice and goodness of God, though prosperity is not always a blessing, nor afflictions always evil. They are always indeed in themselves natural goods and evils, and therefore are the proper exercise of a natural goodness and justice; but with respect to moral ends, to that influence they have upon the direction and government of our lives, what is naturally good may prove a great evil to us; and what is naturally evil may do us the greatest good; and then we must confess, that the goodness of providence must not be measured merely by the natural good or evil of external events, but by such a mixture and temperament of good and evil as is best fitted to govern men in this world, and to make them happy in the next.

3. There is another mistake about the nature of government, and what goodness is required in the government of the world. Now the universal Lord and Sovereign of the world must not only take care of particular creatures, but of the good of the whole: and this in some cases may make the greatest and most terrible acts of severity, such as are enough to affright and astonish the world, acts of the greatest goodness and mercy too: which will vindicate the goodness of providence, when God seems to be most severe, and to have forgot all goodness and compassion. As to explain this in some particular cases.

The good government of the world requires the defence and protection of mankind from violent and unjust oppressions; and the most exemplary vengeance executed upon such private or public oppressors is a great act of goodness and a great deliverance to the oppressed. Ps. cxxxvi. the Psalmist exhorts us, to "give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever." And among other expressions of the divine goodness and mercy, he mentions the plagues of Egypt, and the deliverance of Israel by the overthrow of Pharaoh in the Red Sea; "To him that smote Egypt in their first-born; for his mercy endureth for ever. And brought out Israel from among them, for his mercy endureth for ever. With a strong hand, and with a stretched-out arm, for his mercy endureth for ever. To him which divided the Red Sea into parts, for his mercy, &c., and made Israel to pass through the midst of it,——

but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea; for his mercy, &c. To him who smote great kings,——and slew famous kings, Sihon, king of the Amorites,——and Og the king of Bashan——and gave their land for an heritage, even for an heritage to Israel his servant; for his mercy endureth for ever."

This ought to be well considered before we object the evils and calamities which befall bad men against the goodness of providence. For there are few bad men who suffer any remarkable vengeance but that their sufferings are a great kindness and deliverance to others, and it may be to the public, in breaking their power, or taking them out of the world. And in all such cases the Psalmist has taught us a very proper hymn: "I will sing of mercy and judgment, unto thee, O Lord, will I sing." Ps. ci. 1.

Thus the good government of the world requires some great and lasting examples of God's justice and vengeance against sin: and as terrible as such examples are, they are a great public good to the world.

Some few such examples as these will serve to warn an age, nay many succeeding ages and generations of men; which prevents the more frequent execution of vengeance, and justifies the patience and long-suffering of God to sinners.

If such examples in any measure reform the world, as God intends they should, it makes this world a much happier place; for the better men are, the less hurt, and the more good they will do; and the less evil there is committed in the world, the less mankind will suffer, and the greater blessings God will bestow on them.

And though there be a great deal of wickedness committed in the world after such terrible warnings as these, God may exercise great patience and forbearance towards sinners, without the least blemish to his holiness or justice: for such frightful executions convince the world of God's justice; and when God has publicly vindicated the honour of his justice, he may try gentler methods, and glorify his mercy and patience towards sinners: and thus God punishes, that he may spare; is sometimes very terrible in his judgments, to prevent the necessity of striking often, that

sinners may have sufficient warning, and that he may be good to sinners, without encouraging them in sin.

Thus the destruction of the old world by a deluge of water, when they were past being reformed, is a warning to all sinners as long as this world lasts, and is a public and standing confutation of atheism ; of such " scoffers as say, Where is the promise of his coming ? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation :" the constant and regular course of nature, without any supernatural changes and revolutions, tempts men to think that there is no God in the world, who changes times and seasons ; but this, St. Peter tells us, is visibly confuted by the destruction of the old world ; for " this they are willingly ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water, whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished :" and this is reason enough to fear and expect what God has threatened, that this present world shall be burnt by fire. " But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men :" 2 Peter iii. 5—7. Such destructions as these can be attributed to no natural causes ; but the same word which made the world destroyed the old world by water, and will destroy this by fire, which makes it a visible demonstration of the power and justice of God.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from heaven, is not only a general warning to sinners, but an example of a Divine vengeance against all uncleanness and unnatural lusts. As St. Jude tells us : " Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."—7th verse.

Thus the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, which was attended with the most terrible circumstances that we ever met with in story, is a lasting confutation of infidelity, and a glorious testimony to Christ and his religion : so that most of the terrible examples of God's vengeance, how ter-

rible soever they were to those who suffered, are acts of great goodness to the world, and therefore belong to the goodness of government; by some severe executions to protect and defend the innocent, and reclaim other offenders, without the necessity of terrifying the world in every age with such repeated severities.

Nay, we may observe farther, that when the world is grown very corrupt and degenerate, and such sinners, if they be suffered to continue in it, will certainly propagate their atheism, infidelity, and lewdness to all posterity; it is great goodness to all succeeding generations, to cleanse the world of its impure inhabitants by some great destruction; by sword, or plague, or famine, to lessen the number of sinners, and to possess those who escape with a greater awe and reverence of God's judgments.

Nay, to observe but one thing more; many times these terrible shakings and convulsions of the world are intended by God to open some new and more glorious scene of providence. Thus it was in the four empires which preyed upon each other, and were at last swallowed up by the Roman powers; though they made great destructions in the world, yet they carried learning and civility into barbarous countries, that the general state of the world was much the better for it, and mankind the better disposed to receive the gospel, which then began to be preached by Christ and his apostles.

But this is enough to satisfy us, what little reason there is to impeach the goodness of providence, upon account of those many evils which mankind suffer: if we consider what the goodness of God requires of him, and what is good for us in a state of discipline, and what is necessary to the good government of the world, neither our own, nor other men's sufferings, will tempt us to question the goodness of providence.

I proceed now particularly to examine those objections which are made against the goodness of providence: which are reduced to these two—

1. The many miseries which are in the world.
2. God's unequal care of his creatures, or the unequal

distribution of good and evil, both as to particular men and public societies.

What I have already said contains a sufficient answer to all this; but it will not be amiss for our more abundant satisfaction, to consider some things more largely and particularly.

I. I shall begin with the many miseries of human life. Now this objection relates either to the being of any miseries in the world, or to the number, nature, and quality of them.

1. As for the first; some will not allow God to be good, while there are any miseries in the world:—for, say they, a good God should not suffer any miseries to enter into the world: this I observed and answered before; that the goodness of providence must bear proportion to the nature, qualities, and deserts of creatures; and since man, who was created innocent and happy, forfeited his original happiness by sin, we must now consider, not what absolute, unconfined goodness would do; but what becomes a state of discipline; what is good for sinners, and for a corrupt and degenerate world: and this will abundantly justify the goodness of providence in all the evils which mankind suffer, as you have already heard.

But this will not satisfy some men; for their great quarrel is, that God made such a creature as could sin, and be miserable; that is, that God created angels and men; that he endowed them with reason and understanding, and a liberty of choice; for such creatures as can choose may choose wrong. But this is not an objection against the goodness of providence, but against the goodness of the creation; and if it proves any thing, it proves that God ought not to have made the world; for if goodness would not allow him to make a reasonable creature, who might make himself miserable; wisdom would not allow him to make a world without any reasonable creatures in it.

I confess I am at a great loss to know how they would lay their objection so as to bear upon the goodness of God, and what they intend by it when they have done. For let us consider wherein creating goodness consists.

Does the goodness of a maker require any more of him

than to make all things according to perfect and excellent ideas, and to make them as perfect as their ideas are? What is it then that they find fault with in God's making angels and men? Is not the idea of a reasonable being and a free agent the idea of an excellent and happy creature? Are there any greater perfections than knowledge, and wisdom, and understanding, and liberty of choice? Is there any happiness like the happiness of a reasonable nature? Nay, is there any thing that deserves the name of happiness besides this? Will you call senseless matter, nay, will you call beasts happy? And is the only idea of a happy nature in the world a reasonable objection against creating goodness?

If then there be no fault to be found in the idea of a reasonable creature, was there any defect in the workmanship? Did not God make men and angels as perfect as their ideas? and give them all the happiness which belonged to their natures? If he did not, this would have been a great fault in their creation; if he did, creating goodness has done all that belonged to it to do.

But I would gladly know whence they have this notion of creating goodness, that it must make no creature which can make itself miserable? Justice is as essential to the notion of a God as goodness; and yet it is impossible that justice should belong to the idea of God, if it were irreconcilable with the Divine goodness to make such creatures who may deserve well or ill. For justice respects merit, and consists in rewards and punishments. And if the goodness of God will not suffer him to make a creature which shall deserve either to be rewarded or punished, goodness and justice cannot both of them belong to the idea of a God.

But what pretence is there for any man to say that because the devil and his angels fell from their first happy state, therefore God was not good in creating the angelical nature? or because so many men sin and make themselves miserable, therefore God is not good in creating man? when there are so many myriads of blessed angels and saints eternally happy in the vision and fruition of God, and those who are not so are miserable only by their own fault. Not to have made a happy nature, had been a just blemish to the Divine

goodness—to make happy creatures, though they make themselves miserable, is none; no more than it is to make a free agent, who alone is capable of happiness, and who alone can make himself miserable. None but a reasonable nature is capable of any great happiness; and to make a reasonable creature without liberty of choice, and consequently without a possibility of sinning and being miserable, is a contradiction. For what does reason serve for but to direct our choice? And indeed all the pleasures of virtue, which are the greatest pleasures of human nature, result from this liberty, that we choose well when we might have chosen ill. And if it becomes a good God to make a happy nature, it becomes him to make a reasonable and free agent, though many such creatures may make themselves miserable.

But suppose we could not answer this objection, that God has made such creatures as both could and do make themselves miserable, what is it they intend by it? Would they prove that God did not make the world, because he made angels and men, some of whom have made themselves devils? Those who are saints and angels still shall answer this objection, when any man has confidence enough seriously to make it. Or would they prove that God does not govern the world with goodness and justice, because he has made such creatures, as by the good or ill use of their liberty, make themselves the subjects of both? There is no other necessary answer to that, but only to ask, what place there could be for a governing Providence, were there no creatures who could deserve well or ill?

But this is enough in answer to an objection which no considering man would seriously make. The more considerable objection relates to the many evils and miseries that are in the world; and the only objection which, if it were true, could have any weight in it is, that the miseries of this life are so many, so great, and so universal, that they overbalance the pleasures and comforts of it; that a wise man would rather choose not to be, than to live in this world. And though the generality of mankind are of another mind, and therefore need no answer to this, yet they think they have the Scripture on their side. For the wise man, Eccl.

iv. 2, 3, tells us: "Wherefore I praised the dead, which are already dead, more than the living which are yet alive: Yea, better is he than both they, who hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun."

This at first view looks like a very sharp satire upon human life—that it is better to die than to live—and that not to live at all is better than either. And were this universally true, it were a vain thing to think of vindicating the goodness of Providence in the government of this world, which has nothing good or desirable in it. That this is not the meaning of the words we may certainly conclude from those many promises which are made to good men in this life, and God would not promise good men what is worth nothing.

But the explication of this text will contribute very much to the understanding of this whole matter; and therefore I shall

1. Show you that this is not universally true, nor intended so to be understood by the wise man, that it is better to die, or not to be, than it is to live.

2. Show you in what sense the wise man meant this, viz., with respect to the many miseries and calamities which some ages of the world, and which some men in all ages are exposed to; and how this also is to be understood.

(1.) That this is not universally true; that it is better to die, or not to be born, than it is to live. This, I confess, was taught by some of the ancient philosophers and poets in too general terms: that the first best thing is not to be born; and the next to die quickly. But nobody believed them, for most men felt it otherwise; that "light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun:" Eccl. xi. 7. There is a sense indeed wherein this may be true. If we acknowledge that this life in its greatest glory and perfection is the most imperfect state that a reasonable soul can live in, as most certainly it is, then those philosophers who did believe that the souls of men lived and acted before they were born into this world, and were thrust into these bodies in punishment for what they had done amiss in a former state, had reason to say, that the best thing is not to be born; for upon this supposition, it is best for them

to continue in that state of happiness, and not to come into this world. And if, when they die, they return to their original state of happiness, the next best thing for them is to die quickly; and it is most probable that this was their secret meaning in it. For if we only consider the advantages and disadvantages of life, in ordinary cases life is very desirable; so desirable that it makes death the king of terrors.

It would be a great reproach to the wisdom and goodness of Providence were this life so contemptible, or so calamitous a state, that it were more desirable not to be, than to live in this world. But no man yet ever made life an objection against Providence, though we know they do the miseries and calamities of life. Men may make themselves miserable without any reproach to Providence, and most of the miseries that are in the world are owing to men's own fault or folly. But had God made life itself so contemptible or miserable a state as to be worse than not being, this had been an unanswerable objection.

I am sure we are very ungrateful to Almighty God, if we do not acknowledge that bountiful provision which he has made for the happiness of mankind in this world. For what is wanting on God's part to make man as happy as he can be here? We want no sense which is useful to life, we want no objects to gratify those senses; and which is very considerable, the most useful, and necessary, and delightful objects, are most common, and such as mankind pretty equally share in. There is not such a mighty difference, as some men imagine, between the poor and the rich: in pomp, and show, and opinion, there is a great deal, but little as to the true pleasures and satisfactions of life: they enjoy the same earth, and air, and heavens; hunger and thirst make the poor man's meat and drink as pleasant and refreshing as all the varieties which cover a rich man's table; and the labour of a poor man is more healthful, and many times more pleasant too than the ease and softness of the rich; to be sure much more easy than the cares and solicitudes, the pride and ambition, discontents, and envyings, and emulations, which commonly attend an exalted fortune.

These indeed at best are but mean pleasures, the plea

sures of sense, which are the lowest pleasures a reasonable soul is capable of; but yet they are so entertaining, that the generality of mankind think it worth living to enjoy them, nay, most men know little of any other pleasures but these; and as philosophically as some may despise the body and all its pleasures in words; there are but a very few who can live above the body, and all its pleasures, while they live in it. But how mean soever these pleasures be, it is certain they make mankind, notwithstanding all the common allays they meet with, not only patient of living, but desirous to live.

And yet there are more noble and divine pleasures which men may enjoy in this world; such as gratify the nobler faculties of the soul—the pleasures of wisdom and knowledge, of virtue and religion; to know and worship God, to contemplate the art, and beauty, and perfection of his works, and to do good to men. These indeed are pleasures that do not make us very fond of this body, nor of this world; for they do not arise from the body, nor are they confined to this world. We have reason to hope, that when we get loose from these bodies, our intellectual faculties will be vastly improved; that we shall know God after another manner than we now do; and discover new and brighter glories, which are concealed from mortal eyes; but yet the pleasures of knowledge, and wisdom, and religion, in this world, are very great and ravishing, and therefore we either do, or may enjoy at present such pleasures as make life very desirable: were there no other, nor happier state after this, yet it were very desirable to come into this world, and live as long as we can here, to enjoy the pleasures and satisfactions which may be enjoyed in this life: and though we know there is a happier life after this, yet there is so much to be enjoyed in this world as generally makes even good men very well contented to stay here as long as God pleases.

(2.) But still we must confess, that though men may live very happily in this world, yet there may be such a state of things, as, if we only compare the sensible advantages and disadvantages of life, may make death much more desirable

than life. "I praised the dead, which are already dead, more than the living, which are yet alive."

For the understanding of which, we must consider that this is one of those sayings which must not be strictly and philosophically examined, nor stretched to the utmost sense the words will bear; it has some truth, and something of figure and rhetoric in it, as many of our common and proverbial speeches have, which must be expounded to a qualified sense.

We must observe, then, that the design of this whole book of Ecclesiastes is not to put us out of conceit with life, but to cure our vain expectations of a complete and perfect happiness in this world; to convince us that there is no such thing to be found in mere external enjoyments, which are nothing but "vanity and vexation of spirit." And the end of all this is, not to make us weary of life, but to teach us to moderate our love to present things, and to seek for happiness in the practice of virtue, in the knowledge and love of God, and in the hopes of a better life: for this is the application of all. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Not only his duty, but his happiness too; "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil:" Eccl. xii. 13, 14.

Among other arguments to prove how vain it is to expect a complete happiness in this world, the wise man instances the many oppressions and sufferings which men are liable to, and which sometimes befall them, which may be so sore and grievous, and make life so uneasy and troublesome, as may tempt men, who only consult their own sensible satisfaction, to prefer death before life: and this seems to be all that the wise man means, that we may live in such a troublesome and tempestuous state of things, that the mere external enjoyments of this life cannot recompense the troubles of it; for this is all that his design required him to prove, the vanity of all external enjoyments. And if ever the case be such, that a wise man would choose rather to leave this world, and to leave all these enjoyments behind him, than to endure the troubles and calamities wherewith they are

attended, they are vain indeed. But this does not prove that a wise man ought to despise life for the troubles of it, that he should choose to run out of the world to be eased of its troubles: or that a wise man, notwithstanding all these troubles, cannot make himself easy and happy in it; and consequently it does not prove that a wise man, in such cases, should prefer death before life, though it may reasonably enough cure his fondness for life, and make him welcome death whenever God pleases to send it. Let us then briefly consider these things. And,

1. Let us take a view of those troubles and disorders which may make a wise man willing to part with all the external enjoyments and pleasures of life to be rid of the troubles of it, and make him think those men happy who are escaped out of this world, or are not yet come into it.

King Solomon the Preacher gives us two accounts of this; the first before, the second immediately after this text. In the first verse he tells us: "So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun, and beheld the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter." And hence he concludes, "Wherefore I praised the dead that are already dead, more than the living who are yet alive." Which signifies the public oppressions either of the supreme power, or of subordinate magistrates. The second relates to private factions, envyings, emulations, which many times make life as uneasy as the public miscarriages of government. "Again, I considered all travel, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour: This is also vanity and vexation of spirit:" Eccl. iv. 4. These two contain most of those evils in them which disturb and distract human life; but I shall not discourse this matter according to rules of art and method, but shall beg leave to give you a short view of such a state of things as might make a man, who consults only his own ease, very contented to slip out of the world and to leave foolish mortals to end the scuffle as well as they can.

When a kingdom is in a strong convulsion, assaulted by powerful enemies abroad, and divided by busy and restless

factions at home; when men live in perpetual fear and suspense, know not what to call their own, nor how long they shall enjoy it; when some men think themselves bound in conscience to ruin themselves, their country, and their religion; others will sacrifice their country, and consequently themselves too, to private ambitions, resentments, or revenge; and try their fortune over again in some new changes and revolutions of government. When such public disputes as these influence all inferior societies, and, as sometimes they have done, corrupt public justice, dissolve the most intimate friendships, make conversation uneasy or dangerous, set every man's sword, or which is almost as fatal, every man's tongue against his brother; when no man's fame, no man's life is secure; but a slandering tongue may blast one, and a perjured tongue destroy the other; when zeal and faction make characters of men, dispose of life, of honour, of estates, and religion itself serves for little else but to inspire men with zeal and faction: when we cannot live in the world without seeing, or hearing, or feeling ten thousand villanies that are committed in it, what should make any man fond of life? Why should we not come to good old Simeon's *Nunc demittis*, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." Such a troublesome state of things in this world must needs make all considering men think of a better, and as glad to get out of this as a mariner is to recover the haven after a violent storm at sea. Thus I say it must be, if we consider only the present advantages or disadvantages of life; for perpetual fears and cares, strife, and contention, oppression, injustice, defamation, &c., destroy the ease and security of life, and the freedom and pleasure of conversation, without which all the other pleasures of life are very tasteless.

And here I cannot but bewail the folly and distraction of mankind, who are fond of life, and impatiently thirst after happiness, but will not suffer either themselves or others to live and to be happy. Who bite and devour each other, and by their ungoverned passions raise such hurricanes in the world, that there is no ease, nor rest, nor happiness to be found but in a grave, or in a charnel-house: "Where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary be

at rest, where the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor, the small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master:" Job iii. 17—19.

Did men consider what it is to live and to be happy, it would convince them that there is nothing in this world worth purchasing with eternal discontents, envyings, emulations, jealousies, fears, with doing all the mischiefs and injuries we can, and with suffering all the injuries which others can do; nay, indeed it is wonderful to me, that men's own sense and feeling, if they will not be at the pains to reason the matter, do not convince them of this. To live is not merely to be, but to be happy; and to be happy does not signify merely to have, but to enjoy; and to enjoy, requires an easy, serene, undisturbed mind, which can relish what it has, and extract its true pleasure and satisfaction. The security of life, the easiness and freedom of conversation, when we fear no spies upon our words and actions, no malicious eye, no slandering tongue; when our lives are spent in the exchange of good offices, in the endearments and caresses of friendship, or at least in mutual civilities and respects; this is to live, and to be happy. A very little of what is external will make such a state as this happy, which all the power and all the riches of the world cannot do; when to get or keep it, divides the hearts and the interests of men, ferments their passions, destroys friendships, and all mutual trust and confidence, cantons and crumbles human societies into parties and factions, and animates them with a bitter zeal and rage, to reproach and vilify, supplant and undermine each other; if this be to be happy, or the way to happiness in this world, it is time to seek for happiness out of it.

2. And yet this is no reason for a wise and good man to despise or abhor life, much less to force his passage out of this world. There is no difficulty in persuading the generality of mankind to live, notwithstanding all the troubles and calamities they meet with. The love of life is natural and strong, and reconciles men to great miseries before they desire that death should ease them. Self-murder is so unnatural a sin, that it is, now-a-days, thought reason enough to prove any man distracted; we have too many sad exam-

ples what a disturbed imagination will do, if that must pass for natural distraction; but we seldom or never hear, that mere external sufferings, how severe soever, tempt men to kill themselves. The Stoicks themselves, whose principle it was to break their prison when they found themselves uneasy, very rarely put it into practice: nature was too strong for their philosophy; and though their philosophy allowed them to die when they pleased, nature taught them to live as long as they could; and we see that they seldom thought themselves miserable enough to die.

There is no danger then of frightening men out of this world by the troubles and calamities of it; that I need not concern myself with such fears, but yet without contradicting Solomon, to vindicate the providence of God, and to support and encourage good men, I shall briefly show you that it is very desirable for a good man to live on, and that a wise and good man may live very happily, notwithstanding all the troubles and difficulties which he may, and sometimes must encounter in this world. For difficulties are a glorious scene of virtue, and such a virtue as can conquer difficulties has its rewards, its pleasures and satisfactions, even in this life.

It is very necessary that good men should live in very bad times, not only to reprieve a wicked world, that God may not utterly destroy it, as he once did in the days of Noah, when all flesh had corrupted its ways; but also to season human conversation, to give check to wickedness, and to revive the practice of virtue by some great and bright examples, and to redress those violences and injuries which are done under the sun; at least to struggle and contend with a corrupt age, which will put some stop to the growing evil, and scatter such seeds of virtue as will spring up in time. It is an argument of God's care of the world, that antidotes grow in the neighbourhood of poisons; that the most degenerate ages have some excellent men, who seem to be made on purpose for such a time, to stem the torrent, and to give some ease to the miseries of mankind: and would it become such men, when the world so much needs them, to get out of it if they could? to choose the quiet and silent retirement of woods and deserts, or of the grave,

to avoid the trouble of serving God, or doing good to men? Great minds cannot do this; virtue is made for difficulties, and grows stronger and brighter for such trials; it lays a mighty obligation on mankind to serve the public good with labour and danger; to purchase the ease, and liberty, and security of their country at the price of their own ease, and the utmost hazard of their lives and fortunes; to oppose a hardened, laborious, and unwearied virtue against zeal and faction, and not, like Issachar, to crouch between two burdens, and cry, rest is good. And it is a mighty pleasure to a virtuous mind to feel its own strength, to contend with difficulties, as far as virtue and prudence direct, with an unbroken mind; it is always pleasant to do good, but yet it has the sweeter relish the dearer we pay for it. This is a pleasure above all the ease and luxury of the world; it not only sweetens all the troubles of life, but turns them into triumphs; to endeavour to bear up a sinking world, though he should at last be crushed in the ruins of it, will make the very ruins he sinks under, an illustrious monument of his virtue: to do all that a wise and good man ought to do, without regard to his own ease, to save a sinking church and state, will make him fall with pleasure, and perpetuate his memory with honour; for in spite of envy and detraction, virtue will always be honourable in the grave. But I cannot enlarge on these things, and therefore shall give you the result of all I have said in two or three observations.

(1.) That though the troubles and calamities which we often meet with in this world do not prove life to be a contemptible state, or worse than not being, yet they do prove life to be a very imperfect state: that the mere sensual pleasures and advantages of life, together with these great allays, are but vanity and vexation of spirit. Wise men see that there can be no complete happiness in this world, and that it is vain to expect it; for how can this world make us happy, which, though it has its pleasures, has its troubles, and cares, and disappointments too; is an insecure and mutable state, exposed to chance and accident, to the lusts and passions of men; is always checkered with prosperous and adverse events; has always a mixture of good and evil, and many times the evil is the prevailing ingredient. And

therefore, though the natural love of life, and the many sweets and comforts of it, reconcile very miserable people to living, yet a wise man sees no reason to be fond of this state, much less to dream of perfect and lasting happiness in it.

(2.) The many troubles we are exposed to, plainly prove that there is no happiness to be had in this world, but in the practice of virtue. It was a vain brag of the Stoics, that virtue alone could make a man happy; that their wise man could be perfectly happy in Phalaris's bull; for virtue is not meat and drink and clothes, cannot cure bodily pain and sickness, nor satisfy the appetites and desires of the body; and while a wise man lives in a mortal body, he must feel the wants and pains of it; and to be in want and pain is not happiness. But yet thus much is certainly true, that nothing can make a man happy in this world without the practice of virtue; and that when we must encounter the troubles and difficulties of life, nothing can give us any degree of ease and satisfaction but the practice of virtue. We may meet with such troubles as will sour all our other enjoyments, and make them unable to bear up our spirits, which sink under their own weight, under the disorders of their own passions: are tormented with fears, with disappointments, with envy, with rage; and when they cannot bear themselves, can bear nothing else, nor relish their wonted pleasures: but you have already heard, that virtue has its proper pleasures in the greatest difficulties; inspires us with prudent counsels to disentangle ourselves; animates us with courage and bravery to resist the evil, or to bear it; sweetens our labours with the satisfaction of great and generous actions for the public good; keeps our own passions under government, and triumphs over an adverse fortune, by raising the mind above it. By such helps as these a good man may enjoy some competent measure of ease and satisfaction in the worst condition; but when such troubles surprise a mind unarmed and unfortified with virtue, unable to resist and unable to bear, we may then with great truth and reason apply this text to him: "I praised the dead who are already dead, more than the living, who are yet alive." Were the state of this world always easy and prosperous

there would be little need of passive virtues, though virtue in general is always necessary to make men happy; but all men must be sensible how necessary passive and suffering virtues are for an inconstant, troublesome and suffering state, which is always in some degree the state of this world; and that will convince those who will consider it, how necessary the practice of virtue is to make men happy.

(3.) Though the troubles of this life are no reason why a good man should hasten his escape out of this world before his time, yet they are a very good reason to make him contented to leave this world, whenever God calls him out of it. For though virtue will sweeten labours and difficulties, yet no man would choose always to live in a state of war. Ease and rest are very pleasant and refreshing after labour; though a prince be glorious in the field, covered with dust and sweat, and sprinkled with the blood of his enemies, yet the triumphs of a secure and quiet throne are greater and more desirable. And this makes the grave too in some degree acceptable after the toils and labours of virtue, that "there the weary are at rest;" especially since this rest is not a state of insensibility; for all the labours and difficulties of a virtuous life a e infinitely to be preferred before the ease and rest of knowing, and feeling, and being sensible of nothing, which is the rest of a stone, and of things without life, not the rest of a man. But "they rest from their labours, and their works follow them;" they rest in a peaceful and secure enjoyment of endless happiness; they rest from all the labours of virtue and enjoy its rewards.

This is a sufficient justification of providence with respect to the present evils and calamities of life; for it is what exactly becomes the goodness of providence in this world; such a mixed state of good and evil, as may wean us from the tempting vanities of this life, and convince us that there is no perfect happiness to be found here, which is necessary to raise our hearts above this world, and to set our affections upon things above, which is an eternal state of perfect ease and rest: and since religion and virtue are necessary to our future happiness, nothing can be better for us than such a state of things as shall make virtue necessary to our present happiness; and since we must leave this world, and death

is the king of terrors, whatever reconciles us to death, and makes it easy, may be reckoned one of the greatest pleasures and securities of human life.

2. In answer to this objection against the goodness of providence from those many evils and calamities that are in the world, we must consider, that most of the evils of human life are owing to men's own wickedness and folly, and it is very unreasonable to make those evils an objection against providence, which men wilfully bring upon themselves. Thus the wise man long since stated this question: "The foolishness of man perverteth his ways, and his heart fretteth against the Lord:" Prov. xix. 3. Men make themselves miserable, and then reproach the Divine providence with their miseries: and therefore I shall briefly show you, that mankind undo themselves; and that the evils which men bring upon themselves are no reasonable objection against the goodness of providence.

(1.) The first is a very proper subject for a satire against the folly and wickedness of mankind, but needs no proof. If we take a survey of the many miseries of human life, and resolve them into their immediate and natural causes, we shall find, that most men take great care to leave very little for God to do in the punishment of wickedness in this world.

There are but two visible causes of all the miseries that are in the world; either the disorders of nature or the wickedness of men: by the disorders of nature I mean, unseasonable weather, earthquakes, excessive heat or cold, great droughts, or immoderate rains, thunders, lightnings, storms and tempests, which occasion famines and plagues, great sickness, or a great mortality; these may very reasonably be attributed to the more immediate hand of God, who directs and governs nature; but besides that, in such cases, the visible corruption of mankind justifies such severities; how rarely do these happen, and how few suffer by them, in comparison with those many and constant evils which the wickedness of men every day bring upon themselves and others. For most of the other evils and calamities of life are visibly owing to men's sins. Bodily sickness, sharp and painful distempers, which shorten men's lives, or make them

miserable, are the common effects of intemperance, luxury, or wantonness; children inherit the diseases of their parents, and come into the world only to cry and die, or to struggle some few years in the very kingdom and territories of death; and to languish under those mortal wounds which they received with the first beginnings of life.

Another great evil is poverty, which many men bring upon themselves by idleness, or prodigality, and some expensive vices. It is not in every man's power by the greatest prudence and industry to make himself rich; for "time and chance" happeneth to them all; but in ordinary cases, prudence and industry, joined with religious regard for God and his providence, will preserve a man from the pressing wants and necessities of poverty. Others, who do not make themselves poor by their own sins, are many times reduced to great poverty by the sins of other men; by injustice, and oppression, and violence; by the miseries and calamities of war, which brings a thousand evils with it; which makes many helpless widows and orphans, deprives men of their patrons and benefactors, drives others from their plentiful fortunes, to seek their bread in a strange land; plunders poor and rich; lays a flourishing country desolate; puts a stop to trade; makes provisions dear, and leaves no work for the poor.

Some others are reduced to poverty more immediately by the providence of God, without their own fault: those who have no other support but their daily labour, are quickly pinched by a long and expensive sickness, or by the infirmities of age, or by the loss of their eyes, or hands, or legs; others are undone by fire or shipwrecks, or the various accidents of trade, which the most wary and cautious men cannot escape, but besides, that there are few of these in comparison with the throngs and crowds of idle, prodigal, self-made poor; God has made provision for all such cases, that no man shall suffer extreme want, by commanding the rich, especially, to supply the wants of such poor, who are properly God's poor, or the poor of God's making; and commanding this under the penalty of their eternal salvation, and the forfeiture of their own estates, if they prove unjust and unfaithful stewards: so that though God makes some

men poor, it is the fault of other men if they suffer want. The poverty they suffer is owing to the providence of God; the wants and miseries they suffer, are owing to the sins, to the uncharitableness of men: for though the world be unequally divided, of which more presently, yet there is enough to supply the wants of all the creatures that are in it; and God never intended that any of his creatures should want necessaries; that one man's plenty and abundance should cause another man to starve: and thus it is in most of the other miseries of life; it is the sin and the folly of mankind which makes them miserable, which is so obvious to every one who will consider it, that I need not expatiate on every particular. I believe there is no man but will confess that were all men good and virtuous, this world would be a very happy place; and if the practice of moral and sociable virtues would make mankind happy, it is no hard matter to guess what it is that disturbs the peace and happiness of the world.

(2.) Let us now consider how unreasonable it is to reproach the Divine providence with those evils and miseries which mankind bring upon themselves. And laying down this as a principle, that most men make themselves miserable, it is very easy to defend and justify the goodness of providence.

For these evils which men complain of are not justly chargeable upon providence, and therefore are an unreasonable objection against providence. God does not bring these evils upon mankind, but men bring them upon themselves. Supposing the nature of things and the nature of man to be what they now are, and that men lived just as they now do, there must be the same miseries in the world that there now are, though there were no providence. Though God did not interpose in the government of the world, yet intemperance, luxury, and lust, would destroy men's health; sloth, and prodigality, and expensive vices, would make men poor; pride, ambition, and revenge, would make quarrels, raise wars, and bring all the calamities of war upon the world; if there were no providence, thus it must be; for excessive eating and drinking will oppress nature; and those who will take no honest pains to

get money, or will spend what they have upon their lusts, must be poor; and those who will quarrel and fight must take what follows; these evils are not owing to providence, because providence does not bring them, no more than providence makes men wicked: men make themselves wicked, and wickedness makes them miserable; and we may as well charge the providence of God with all the wickedness of men, as with those miseries which their own wickedness brings upon them.

Now since most of those evils which are in the world are not justly chargeable upon providence, the goodness of God is very visible in those very evils and calamities which mankind suffer. For,

(1.) God has, in ordinary cases, put it into every man's power to preserve himself from most of the greatest evils and miseries of life, even from all those which men bring upon themselves by their own sins. What could be done more than this for a reasonable creature, to make it his own choice, and to put it into his own power whether he will be happy or miserable? God has, not only in his laws, but in the nature of things, set before us life and death, happiness and misery: all men see what the visible and natural punishments of sin are, and have a natural aversion to those evils, and may avoid them if they will; this is a plain proof, not only of the holiness of providence, as I observed before, in deterring men from sin by those natural evils which attend it, but also of the goodness of providence, by showing men a plain and natural method, how to avoid the miseries of life, and to make themselves easy and happy. Let the most skeptical objector against providence consider with himself, what God could have done more to prevent the miseries of mankind, without changing the nature of man, or the nature of things. To have laid a necessity upon man, that he should never choose, nor do any thing which will bring these evils on him, had been to change his nature, to destroy the free exercise of his reason, and the liberty of choice; and yet men cannot live as they do, and escape these miseries, unless all nature be changed. We must have other kind of bodies than we have, or our meat and drink must have other virtues and qualities, to bear the

disorders and excesses of intemperance and lust, without feeling the inconveniences of it. Fire must not burn, nor water drown, if wine must not inflame, nor a flood of indigested liquors extinguish the vital heat. The whole world must be a paradise, and bring forth fruit of itself, and all things must be possessed in common, or the idle, slothful, prodigal sinners must be poor. Our bodies must be invulnerable and immortal, or there must be no instruments of death in the world; or men who quarrel will fight and kill one another. It is impossible, as the world now is, to separate sin and misery; but men may avoid misery if they please: and that is a very good world, and a good God that made such a world, and a good providence which governs the world, wherein men may make themselves happy if they will.

(2.) Besides this, the goodness of providence is seen in hindering and preventing a great many more evils and miseries which the sins and lusts of men would bring upon the world, were they not under the restraints and government of providence. No man doubts but there might be a great deal more evil and misery in the world than there is, nor that many bad men are inclined to do a great deal more hurt than they do. What is it then, after all, that makes the world so tolerable a place? If this be owing to the providence of God, it is a great argument of his goodness, that he will not suffer foolish sinners to make themselves and others so miserable as they would; that as many furious Phaetons as there are in the world, it is not yet all in flames; but the moral, as well as the natural world, has its temperate, as well as torrid zones:—and what shall we attribute this to, if we do not attribute it to providence? To what else can we ascribe our deliverance from those unseen snares which were laid for us, and which we knew nothing of, till we had escaped; nay, which, it may be, we know nothing of to this day? How many wicked designs prove abortive? how many secret plots are discovered, when ripe for execution? how often does God put a hook into the nostrils of the proudest tyrants, and by some cross accidents, or by weak and contemptible means, breaks their power and humbles them to the dust? Sacred and profane his-

tories are full of such examples, which can be attributed to nothing else but a Divine providence, which sets bounds to the waves of the sea, and to the rage and pride of men. The Scripture teaches us to ascribe our deliverance from all the evils we escape, as well as all the good we enjoy, to a Divine providence; and then we must acknowledge, that the Divine providence prevents all that evil which bad men would do, but cannot; and who knows how much this is? who knows how much evil bad men would do, had they no restraint? that we have much more reason to adore the Divine goodness for restraining the lusts and passions of men, which prevents an universal deluge of misery, than complain that he suffers so many miseries to afflict the world.

(3.) Especially if we consider, in the next place, that God permits bad men to do no more hurt and mischief than what he overrules to wise and good purposes. For God many times serves the wise ends of his providence by the wickedness of men, to punish the wicked and to chastise the good; to exercise the graces and virtues of good men, or to give terrible examples of his vengeance on the wicked; and all this, how severe soever it may be, proves the goodness of providence, because it is for the general good of the world, that bad men should be punished, suppressed, destroyed, and that good men should be made better, and become great and eminent examples of faith and patience. Whatever evils and miseries there are in the world, if there be no more than the good government of the world requires —if no man suffers any more than what he deserves, or than what will do himself good, if he wisely improves it, or will do others good, if they will either take warning by his sufferings or imitate his virtues—all this is not only reconcilable with the goodness of providence, but is an eminent instance of it; for to do good is an expression of goodness, though the ways of doing it may be very severe.

This is a sufficient justification of providence, even as to those evils which God himself immediately inflicts upon the world, that he inflicts no more nor greater evils than what are for the good government of the world, as I have observed before; but it is much more so with reference to

those evils which men bring upon themselves; for is it not wonderful goodness in God to defend us from ourselves. to qualify the malignity of our own sins, to suffer us to do ourselves no more hurt than what he can turn into great good to us, if we consider our ways and learn wisdom by the things which we suffer? So to restrain bad men, that they shall hurt nobody but those whom God thinks fit to punish, or to correct, or to exercise with some severities; and that they shall do no more hurt, nor hurt any longer than the Divine wisdom sees useful to these ends?

Let us then briefly review this objection and answer; and setting aside the consideration of God and his providence, let us suppose it to be the case of a father. And, I hope, what we ourselves would allow to be a reasonable defence of earthly parents, will be thought a good justification of God and his providence.

Suppose then a father has several children, whom he provides very bountifully for, and sends them abroad into the world in such hopeful circumstances that if they will be frugal, diligent, and virtuous, they may live happily and increase their fortunes. Should such children turn prodigals, and waste their estates in rioting and luxury, destroy their health, and suffer all the miseries of sickness and poverty,—would any man blame their good father for this, and would not such a good man think himself much injured, should he be accused of unkindness and severity to his children, only because, after all the kindness he could show them, they have made themselves miserable? especially if we suppose this kind father to keep such a watchful eye over them, and to take such prudent and effectual care as not to suffer them utterly to undo themselves, to make their condition hopeless and desperate, but only to let them feel the smart of their own folly, to bring them to more sober thoughts, not to perish under it, till there is no hope left of reclaiming them. What could a kind father do more for prodigals, unless you would have him maintain them in their luxury and lewdness, which a wise and good father cannot do? He brought none of these miseries upon them, and it is kindness to let them smart under them, to prevent their undoing as long as he can; he turns the miseries they

bring upon themselves only into a state of discipline; he suffers them to injure one another, to make them all sensible of their folly; and those who are past recovery, he makes examples of greater severities to reform the rest. If this would be thought a kind, merciful, and wise conduct in earthly parents, apply it to the providence of God, and you have an answer to most of the miseries of human life.

3. In answer to this objection against the goodness of providence, from the many evils and miseries that are in the world, we may consider further, that as most of these evils are owing to our own or to other men's sins, so it is we ourselves who give the sting to them all. As many external calamities as there are in the world, and as the present state of this world requires there should be in it, God has made abundant provision for the support of good men under them. It is not always in our power to avoid many of the sufferings and calamities of life, but is our own fault if we sink under them. Natural courage and strength of mind, the powers of reason, and a wise consideration of the nature of things, the belief of a good providence, which takes care of us, and orders all things for our good, and the certain hopes of immortal life,—will support good men under their sufferings, and make them light and easy. And if God enable us to bear our sufferings, and to enjoy ourselves under them, to possess our souls in patience, and to rejoice in hope, though we may suffer, we are not miserable; and sufferings without misery are no formidable objections against providence. This is like the bush that was on fire, but was not burnt, a signal token of the Divine presence and favour; and that can be no objection against the goodness of providence. What is merely external, may afflict a good man, but cannot make him miserable; for no man is miserable, whose mind is easy and cheerful, full of great hopes, and supported with divine joys. But the disorders of our passions make us miserable, and make us sink under external sufferings. An immoderate love of this world, pride, ambition, covetousness, anger, hatred, revenge, make every condition uneasy, and any great sufferings intolerable. It is this that makes poverty and disgrace, the loss of estate and honours, the frowns of princes, and the clamours of the

people, such unsufferable evils, which a wise and a good man cannot only bear, but modestly despise. It is this that terrifies us with the least approach of danger, distracts us with fear, and care, and solicitude, and with all the imaginary evils and frightful appearances, which a scared fancy can raise in the dark. Especially when guilt makes men afraid, and look upon every misfortune, disappointment, affliction, as a token of divine vengeance, and a terrible presage of the endless miseries in the next life.

External evils and calamities, as far as they are good, can be no objection against the goodness of providence; and they are good, as far as the providence of God is concerned in them; for they are permitted and ordered by God for wise and good ends; and if they do not prove good to us, it is our own fault who will not be made better by them.

Whatever men suffer, if their sufferings do not make them miserable, this is no just reproach to providence; for God may be very good to his creatures, whatever they suffer, while they can suffer, and be happy; not perfectly and completely happy, which admits of no sufferings, but such a degree of self-enjoyment, as reconciles external sufferings with inward peace, contentment, patience, hope; which are the happiness of a suffering state, and a much greater happiness than the most prosperous fortune without it; and if we be not thus happy under all our sufferings, it is our own fault.

Thus the wise man tells us, that it is not so much external sufferings (which is all that can be charged upon the Divine providence) which makes men miserable, but the inward guilt and disorders of their own minds. Prov. xviii. 14, "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" And if all that God inflicts on us may be borne, our misery is owing to ourselves. But I have so particularly discoursed this upon another occasion, that I shall enlarge no farther on it.

II. Another objection against the goodness of providence, is God's partial and unequal care of his creatures; and I confess partiality is a very great objection, both against justice, and an universal goodness, and such the goodness of providence must be.

The foundation of the objection is this: that there are very different ranks and conditions of men in the world; rich and poor, high and low, princes and subjects, and a great many degrees of power, and honour, and riches, and poverty; and we cannot say, that God deals equally by all these men, whose fortunes are so very unequal. But there is no great difficulty in answering this:—for,

1. The goodness of providence consists in consulting the general good and happiness of mankind, and of particular men in subordination to the good of the whole; and this fully answers the objection: for though there are too many who are not well satisfied with their own station, and never will be, unless they could be uppermost; yet I dare appeal to any man of common sense, whether it be not most for the good of mankind, that there should be very different ranks and orders of men in the world.

There is not any one thing more necessary to the happiness of the world, than good government; and yet there could be no government in an equality; and there is nothing makes such an inequality like an unequal fortune. Were all men equally rich and great, there would be neither subjects nor servants; for no man will choose to be a subject or a servant, who has an equal title to be a lord and master. And then no man could be rich and great, which are only comparative terms; and, which is worse than that, no man could be safe. And if an inequality in men's fortunes be as necessary as government, that is a sufficient justification of providence, for human societies cannot subsist without it.

2. And yet it is a very great mistake to think, that the happiness of men differs as much as their fortunes do; that a prince is as much happier as he is greater than his subjects; for all the world knows that happiness is not entailed on riches, and power, and secular honours; as they have their advantages, so they have very troublesome and sour allays; and it may be, upon a true estimate of things, as different a show and appearance as men make in the world, they are pretty equal as to true enjoyments. There is very little difference in eating and drinking, while we have wherewithal to satisfy nature; for appetite makes every thing delicious; and the hard labour of the poor man is much

more tolerable than gout and stone, and those sharp or languishing diseases, which so commonly attend the softness and luxury of the rich; and as for opinion and fancy itself, which creates the greatest difference, every rank of men make a scene among themselves, and every man finds something to value himself upon: that, it may be, there is nothing wherein all mankind are so equal, as in self-love, and self-flattery, and a value for themselves; that though there are many who would change fortunes with others, there are few that would change themselves; and the difference of fortune is very inconsiderable, while every man is so well satisfied with himself.

3. This inequality of fortunes is for the great good of all ranks of men, and serves a great many wise ends of providence. It makes some men industrious, to provide for themselves and families; it inspires others with emulation to raise their fortunes; it gives life and spirit to the world, and makes it a busy scene of action, to keep what they have, and make new acquisitions; to excel their equals and rival those above them; and though through the folly and wickedness of men this occasions a great deal of mischief, yet the world would be a very dull place without it, there would be no encouragement, no reward for virtue; providence itself would have very little to do; for the visible rewards of virtue, and punishment of wickedness, are in the change of men's fortunes; when industry, prudence, and virtue, advance men of a low condition to the greatest places of trust and honour, or at least to a plentiful and splendid station; and prodigality, luxury, and impiety bring misery, poverty and contempt upon rich and noble families; such revolutions as these are great examples of the wisdom and justice of providence; and therefore the inequality of men's fortunes is so far from being an objection against providence, that there could be little visible exercise either of the goodness or justice of providence without it.

I cannot without some indignation reflect upon the baseness and ingratitude of mankind, who live and move, and have their being in God; who know how little they deserve of him, and feel every day how many blessings they receive from him, and yet seem never better pleased than when

they can find or ignorantly invent some plausible pretence to reproach his goodness; the sense of all mankind confutes such objections; and I should not have thought it worth the while to answer them, were it not a great satisfaction and of great use to contemplate the Divine goodness even on the darkest side of providence: which will teach us a patient and thankful submission to God under all our sufferings, enable us to bear them, and direct us how to prevent or remove them; and give us a more transporting admiration of the Divine goodness, when we see it, like the sun, break through the blackest clouds. If the goodness of God conquers the sins, the perverseness of mankind, and shines through all those miseries which foolish sinners every day bring upon themselves; how good is God when his goodness flows with an undisturbed, uninterrupted current!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WISDOM OF PROVIDENCE.

The unsearchableness of the Divine wisdom, as I observed above, (Chap. IV.) is a very good reason why we should not judge or censure such mysterious passages of providence as we cannot comprehend; but yet it becomes us to take notice of, and to admire that wonderful wisdom which is visible in the government of mankind. We cannot "by searching find out God," we cannot "find out the Almighty unto perfection: It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea:" Job xi. 7—9. But though we cannot discover all the wisdom of providence, no more than we can the wisdom of creation, yet we may discover enough to satisfy us that the world is governed as well as made with infinite wisdom: when we contemplate God, it is like losing ourselves in a boundless prospect, where we see a great many glories and beauties, but cannot see to the end of it.

We may discover admirable and surprising wisdom in that little we see of providence, as I have already briefly observed upon several occasions; but we know so little of what has been done in the world, and by what means it was done, and what ends it served, that it is no wonder if we have as imperfect a view of the wisdom of providence as we have of the history of the world. But yet whoever diligently applies his mind to the study of providence, will see reason to admire a great many events which careless observers make objections against providence; which will be of such great use to confirm us in the belief of a providence, and to give us a profound veneration of the Divine wisdom, that I shall venture to make some little essay of this nature, which though I am sensible must fall infinitely short of the dignity of the subject, yet will suggest some very useful thoughts, and show us the most delightful and profitable way of studying histories and providence. And to do this in the best manner I can, I shall

I. Consider some great events recorded in Scripture, which are as it were the hinges of providence whereon the various scenes of providence turned.

II. I shall take notice of some other visible marks and characters of wisdom in the more common events of providence, especially such as are made objections against providence.

I. Some great events recorded in Scripture, which gave a new face of things to the world, and opened new scenes of providence.

The state of innocence wherein man was created was a state of perfect happiness. There was no death, no sickness, no labour, or sorrow; but the fall of man made a very great change in this visible creation; man himself became mortal, and was condemned to an industrious and laborious life; according to that sentence, "cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field: in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return:" Gen. iii. 17—19.

This was a very severe sentence, which deprived man of immortality, and of the easy and happy life of paradise: condemned him to labour and sorrow while he lived, and then to return unto dust; and yet the wisdom as well as justice of providence is very visible in it; it was not fit that when man had sinned he should be immortal in this world: and an industrious and laborious life is the best and happiest state for fallen man, as I have elsewhere shown at large.

We know little more than this of the antediluvian world, till we hear of the general corruption of mankind, that "the earth was filled with violence, for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth; insomuch that "it repented the Lord that he had made man upon the earth, and it grieved him at his heart:" Gen. vi. This was so universal a corruption, that there was but one righteous family left, only Noah and his three sons; and therefore God resolved to sweep them all away with a universal deluge, excepting that one righteous family whom he preserved in the ark, which he appointed Noah to prepare for that purpose.

The justice of this no man can dispute; for if all flesh corrupt its ways, God may as justly destroy a whole world of sinners, as he can punish or cut off any one single sinner. But that which I am now concerned for, is to show the wonderful wisdom of providence in the destruction of the old world by a deluge of water; and rightly to understand this, we must consider the several circumstances of the story, and what God intended by it.

Now though that wicked generation of men deserved to be destroyed, yet God did not intend to put a final end to this world, nor to cut off the whole race of all mankind, but to raise a new generation of men from a righteous seed; and to make the destruction of the old world a standing warning and a visible lesson of righteousness to the new. And a few observations will satisfy us, that nothing could be more wisely designed for this purpose.

1. Let us consider the wisdom of providence in destroying the old world without the utter destruction of mankind. It was too soon to put a final end to the world which he had so lately made, without reproaching his own wisdom in making it. There had been very little of the

wisdom of government yet seen, but one act, and that concluding in all disorder and confusion; and had God left off here, and put a final end to the race of mankind, it had been but a very ill spectacle to the angelical world, to see a whole species of reasonable beings so soon destroyed. The old serpent, who deceived our first parents, would have gloried in his victory, that he had utterly spoiled and ruined the best part of this visible creation, and even forced God to destroy the most excellent creature he had made on earth. But God had threatened the serpent, that the seed of the woman should break his head, and therefore the whole posterity of Eve must not be destroyed, but a righteous seed must be preserved to new-people the world.

But, besides this, the destruction of the old world being intended as a warning to the new, it was necessary there should be some living witnesses, both of the destruction and the resurrection of the world, to assure their posterity of what they had seen, and to preserve the memory of it to all generations. Of which more presently.

2. The wisdom of God was very visible in delaying so terrible an execution till there was no remedy. To destroy a world carries great horror with it, and makes a frightful representation of God, if it be not qualified with all the most tender and softening circumstances. And I cannot think of any thing that can justify providence in it, (excepting the last judgment, when the Divine wisdom thinks fit to put a final end to this world,) but the irrecoverable state of mankind, and the absolute necessity of some new methods of reforming the world.

And therefore God delayed the destruction of the old world, till all flesh had corrupted his ways, and there was but one righteous family left, which must be in danger of being corrupted too by the universal wickedness of the age. However, it is certain that though Noah might have preserved his own integrity, and have taught his own family the fear and worship of God, yet he could do no good upon the rest of the world: he was a preacher of righteousness, but his sermons had no effect. It is generally concluded by the ancients, that he was a hundred years in building the ark, and all this while he gave visible warning to them of the approaching deluge. Now when it was impossible, by

any ordinary means, to put a stop to the wickedness of mankind, what remained but to destroy that corrupt and incurable generation, and to preserve righteous Noah and his sons, to propagate a new generation of men, and to train them up in the fear and worship of God? Had he delayed a little longer, the whole world might have been corrupt, without one righteous man in it; and then he must either have maintained and preserved a world of atheists and profligate sinners, or must have destroyed them all. But it more became the Divine wisdom, when religion was reduced to one family, to defer vengeance no longer, while he had one righteous family to save, to preserve the race of mankind, and to restore lost piety and virtue to the world.

3. The wisdom of providence in destroying the old world is very visible in the manner of doing it.

(1.) For it was a miraculous and supernatural destruction, and therefore an undeniable evidence of the power and providence of God. There are no visible causes in nature to do this, and therefore it must be done by a power superior to nature.

Some men think it sufficient to disparage the Mosaical account of the deluge, if they can prove the natural impossibility of it; and others, who profess to believe the story, think themselves much concerned to give a philosophical account of it, without having recourse to miracles and a supernatural power, which they say unbecomes philosophers. But if it unbecomes philosophers to believe miracles, I doubt they will think it very much below them to be Christians, which no man can be who does not believe miracles: and if they will allow of miracles in any case, methinks they should make no scruple to attribute the destruction of the world to a miraculous and supernatural power.

The comfort is, the truth of the story does not depend upon any philosophical hypothesis. We do not believe the whole world was drowned, because we can tell by what natural causes it might be drowned, but because Moses has recorded it in his writings, who, we know, was divinely inspired. And we know also, that there has been no satisfactory account given yet, from the principles of nature and philosophy, how the whole world could be drowned; at

least, none that will agree with the Mosaical history, either of the creation or of the deluge, and it is better to have no account, than such an account as confutes Moses, could any such be given; for this confutes, or at least discredits the story itself, for which we have no authentic authority, when the authority of Moses is lost. But indeed it is no service to religion to seek after natural causes for the destruction of the world, any more than it is to resolve the making of the world into natural causes; for it is great good nature in men to own a God, if they can make and destroy a world without him: there can be no such thing as natural causes, till the world is made, and every thing endowed with its natural virtues and powers, and united into a regular frame, with a mutual dependence and connection; and therefore it is a vain thing to talk of making the world by natural causes, when it is demonstrable that there can be no natural causes till the world is made. And it is as certain, that nature must move unnaturally, and be put into an universal disorder, before the world can be destroyed; for while natural causes keep their natural course, they will preserve, not destroy the world; and therefore the destruction of the world is not owing to natural causes, but to preternatural disorders; and what philosophy can give an account of that? What can put nature into such an universal disorder, but the same Divine power which put it into order, and gave laws to it?

And this is what God intended in the destruction of the old world, to give a visible and lasting proof of his being and providence to the new, by such a miraculous deluge as could be attributed to no other cause but a Divine vengeance.

That universal corruption of mankind would persuade us, that the very belief and notion of a God was lost among them; or if it be hard to conceive how that should be, when the world, by computation, was not seventeen hundred years old, and Lamech, Noah's father, lived fifty years with Adam himself, that it seems impossible that the tradition of God's creating the world should have been lost in so short a time; yet at least they could have no sense of God's justice and providence; they could not believe that God took any notice of their actions, or would execute such a

terrible vengeance on them for their sins. We do not read of any one act of judgment which God exercised before the flood; and it is not improbable that his sparing Cain, when he had killed his brother Abel, might encourage them with hopes of impunity, whatever wickedness they committed. And therefore the Divine wisdom saw it necessary to put an end to the old, and begin the new world with a visible demonstration of his power and justice, to teach men the fear, and reverence, and worship of that God who not only made the world, but has once destroyed it, and therefore can destroy it again, with all its wicked inhabitants, whenever he pleases.

Now to make this a lasting proof of God's power and justice, it must be evident beyond all contradiction, that it was God's doing, and therefore it was necessary that God should destroy the world in so miraculous a manner as could be attributed to no other cause; for it is the true spirit of atheism and infidelity to attribute nothing to God which they can ascribe to any visible cause.

Had all mankind, excepting Noah and his sons, been destroyed by plague, or famine, or wild beasts, though such a general destruction would have convinced wise and reasonable men that the hand and the vengeance of God was in it; yet if we may judge of the rest of mankind by the wonderful improvements in wit and philosophy which our modern atheists have made, they would think scorn to attribute plague or famine, or such like evil accidents, to God, though all mankind were destroyed by them. But when they hear of a world drowned, and know not where to find water to drown it without a miraculous dissolution of nature, they must either laugh at the story, which men in their wits cannot well do, or they must believe a God and a providence. But whatever shift the infidels of our age may make to disbelieve the universal deluge, it must be confessed that it was a very wise and most effectual means to convince that new generation of men, while the uncorrupted tradition of the deluge was preserved.

(2.) The wisdom of the Divine providence was seen in destroying that wicked generation of men, without destroying the earth. God did not intend to put a final end to the race of mankind, but the earth was to be again inhabited by a new generation; and a deluge of waters was best fitted to this purpose, which did no hurt to the earth

when it was dried up again, but rather moistened and impregnated it with new seeds and principles of life.

There are but two ways we know of to destroy this earth, either by water or fire. It has already been destroyed by water, and will be destroyed by fire. And it is enough to satisfy any man that this is not accident, but a wise design, to consider that a deluge of water was made use of to purge and reform the world, but fire is reserved for the final destruction of it. Whereas, had this order been inverted, as it might have been had it been mere chance, it is evident that the earth could neither have been preserved from fire, nor utterly destroyed by water, without a perpetual deluge. A deluge of water does not destroy the earth, nor make it uninhabitable after the deluge ceases; but fire destroys the frame and constitution of it, and melts all into one confused mass. There is some defence against a deluge: Noah and his sons were preserved in the ark, to people the new world. But there is no defence against flames; the whole earth and all the wicked inhabitants of it, must burn together. And this is one wise reason why God chose to drown the world, not to burn it, because the end of all things was not yet come.

(3.) There is great variety of wisdom to be observed in God's preserving Noah and his sons in the ark from perishing by the water.

For, *first*, as I observed before, this was very necessary to preserve the race of mankind to new-people the world, which much more became the Divine wisdom, than to have created man anew. "When all flesh had corrupted his ways," it became God to try new methods of reforming the world; for this opens new and surprising scenes of providence, and displays such a multifarious wisdom in the government of mankind, as is much more wonderful than the creation of a new world would be. But had God destroyed the whole race of men, and created a new man to inhabit the new world, this would have argued some defect in the first creation: for there can be no pretence for destroying man to make him again, but a design to make him better—to correct that in a second trial which experience had discovered to be faulty in the first. But though the wisdom of government will admit of various trials and experiments, the wisdom of creation will not. The government of free

agents must be accommodated to their natures and dispositions, not only to what God made them, but to what they make themselves. And therefore the methods of government must change, as men change themselves; but the natures of all things are made only by God, and if there be any fault in them, it is chargeable upon Divine wisdom. And to make man, and destroy him, and make him again, would argue a great fault somewhere.

Secondly. I observed also before, that to make the destruction of the old world of any use to propagate religion and piety in the new, it was necessary that some inhabitants of the old world should survive the deluge, to be witnesses of that terrible destruction.

Had no man survived, though God should have created man anew, that new generation of men could have known nothing of the deluge, but by revelation. Whereas God intended a sensible proof of his power and providence, which mankind wanted.

Besides that revelation which we may suppose God made to Adam of the creation of the world, and his own sense that he himself was but just then made, and was the first and the only man upon the earth, there are such visible marks of a Divine wisdom and power in the frame of the world, as one would think should be sufficient to convince men that the world was made, and is preserved and governed by God. And yet because no man saw the world made, neither reason nor revelation can persuade some men that God made the world. And is it reasonable then to think, that when there are no remaining signs of a deluge left, the belief of a deluge should for any long time have prevailed in the world without any living witnesses who saw the deluge, though we should suppose God to have revealed it to new-created man? No man could see the creation of the world, because the world must be made before man was made to live in it. But though no man saw the world made, there were some who saw the destruction which the deluge made, which was as visible a proof of the Divine power, and a much greater proof of a just and righteous providence. No man who believes that God destroyed the old world with a deluge of water, can doubt whether God made the world and governs it; and for this the new world had the testimony

of eye-witnesses, which is as sensible a proof of a God and a providence as we can possibly have.

Thirdly. The preservation of Noah and his sons in the ark, was an evident proof, that this deluge was sent by God: God forewarned Noah of it a hundred years before it came, and commanded him to prepare an ark, and gave him directions how to make it. Thus much is certain, that Noah did know of it beforehand, and prepared an ark, which remained as a visible testimony of the flood to future generations. Now there being no natural causes of the flood, there could be no natural prognostics of it. Our Saviour himself observes, that there were not the least symptoms of any such thing, till Noah entered into the ark; and therefore Noah had no other way of knowing this, but by revelation; and it was so incredible a thing in itself, that the rest of mankind would not believe him, though he warned them of it, and they saw that he believed it himself, by his preparing an ark for his own safety. And if we believe the account that Moses gives of it, that some of all sorts of living creatures, both the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, were preserved with Noah in the ark, (as we must believe, if we believe the universal deluge, unless we will say, that God new-made all living creatures after the flood,) what account can be given of this, that some of all sorts, in such numbers as God had appointed, and had prepared reception for, should come of their own accord to Noah, when he was ready to enter into the ark, had they not been led thither by a Divine hand?

Fourthly. The preservation of Noah and his sons in the ark did not only prove that the deluge was sent by God, but was a plain evidence for what reason God sent such a terrible judgment, viz. to put an end to that wicked generation of men, and to new-people the world with a righteous seed. This reason God gave to Noah, and the nature of the thing speaks it. For when all the wicked inhabitants of the world were destroyed, and not one escaped the deluge, but only that one righteous family, which had escaped the corruptions of the age too, and that preserved by the peculiar order and direction of God, this is a visible judgment upon all the wicked of the earth, and makes a visible distinction between good and bad men. When such

evils and calamities befall the world, as may be resolved into natural or moral causes, as plagues, and famines, and wars, fires, and earthquakes; and it may be good and bad men share pretty equally in the public misfortunes; atheists and infidels will not allow these evils to be inflicted by God, much less to be the punishment of sin, when they make no visible distinction between the good and the bad; but the universal deluge was both a supernatural and a distinguishing judgment; none but God could destroy the earth, and none but the wicked were destroyed; and therefore this is an undeniable demonstration of the justice and righteousness of God, that he hates wickedness, and will punish wicked men.

There are some other marks of excellent wisdom in the universal deluge, which I shall only name, because, though they are worth observing, yet they are of less moment as to my present design.

As the deluge was to be a lasting proof of a just providence to the new world, and, as you have heard, was upon all accounts admirably fitted to that purpose, so we may reasonably suppose that when it came, it convinced that wicked generation of men and brought them to repentance, which it gave them some time for; and though it could not save them in this world, who knows but that a sudden repentance, upon such a sudden conviction, might obtain mercy for them in the next? Noah was a preacher of righteousness: he had often reproved them for their sins, and threatened them with a deluge, but they would not believe him, though they saw him preparing the ark; but when they saw the flood come, they knew then the meaning of it from what Noah had often told them; and this must needs convince them of the terrible justice and vengeance of God. And the gradual increase of the flood gave them some time to repent in, and to beg God's pardon; and I am sure this makes a glorious representation, both of the goodness and wisdom of God, in the most terrible judgment that ever was executed upon the world, if we had sufficient reason to believe, as there want not some fair appearances of it, that God intended the deluge as well to convince and save all that could be brought to repentance in the old world as to reform the new.

Thus since God had determined to destroy that wicked generation of men, and to preserve only Noah and his three sons—to destroy the earth by a deluge, and to shut up Noah in the ark, was as great or a greater mercy to Noah than his preservation was,—let us suppose that, instead of drowning the world, God had at once destroyed all mankind by plague, or thunder from heaven, or some other sudden stroke, excepting Noah and his sons, who should be eye-witnesses of this terrible execution, and live to see the earth covered with dead bodies and none left to bury them; and their cities lie waste and desolate, without inhabitants; who can conceive what the horror of such a sight would have been? Who would have been contented to live in such a world, to converse only with the images of death and with noisome carcasses? But God, in great mercy, shut up Noah in the ark, that he should not see the terror and consternation of sinners when the flood came; and he washed away all their dead bodies into the caverns of the earth, with all the marks and signs of their old habitations, that when Noah came out of the ark, he saw nothing but a new and beautiful world—nothing to disturb his imagination, no marks or remains of that terrible vengeance.

This indeed destroyed all other living creatures as well as sinners, excepting those that were in the ark with Noah: but this, I suppose, is no great objection against providence, that the creatures which were made for man's use were destroyed with man, since God preserved some of each kind for a new increase; and yet the wisdom of God was very visible in this; for had the world been full of beasts, when there were but four men in it, the whole earth would quickly have been possessed by wild and savage creatures, which would have made it a very unsafe habitation for men.

To conclude this argument, the sum of it in short is this. When the wickedness of mankind was grown universal and incurable, it became the wisdom of God to put an end to that corrupt state, and to propagate a new race of men from a righteous stock, and to take the most effectual course to possess them with a lasting belief of his being and providence, and with a religious awe of his justice and power. To this end, he destroyed the old world with a deluge of water, and preserved Noah and his sons in the ark—which

had all the advantages imaginable to deter men from sin, which brought a deluge upon the old world—and to encourage the practice of true piety and virtue, which preserved Noah from the common ruin.

We see in this example that numbers are no defence against the Divine justice, and therefore no security to sinners: when "all flesh had corrupted his ways," God destroyed them all; nay, we see that the more wickedness prevails in the world, the nearer it is to destruction; that the great multitude of sinners is so far from being a reasonable temptation and encouragement to sin, that it is a fair warning to considering men to separate and distinguish themselves from a wicked world by an exemplary virtue, that God may distinguish them also when he comes to judgment, which an universal corruption of manners shows to be very near; and it is a dangerous thing to sin with a multitude, when the multitude of sinners will hasten vengeance.

Here we see, that though sinners may be very secure, they are never safe; as our Saviour observes, it was "in the days of Noah, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriages, until the day that Noah went into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away:" Matt. xxiv. 37—39. God may delay punishment a great while, and seem to take no notice of what is done below till sinners begin to think that he is "such an one as themselves;" but their judgment all this while "neither slumbers nor sleeps:" Ps. l. 21. There may be the greatest calm and the serenest days before the most terrible earthquakes; and the longer God has kept silence, the more reason have we to expect a severe and surprising vengeance, which makes the Psalmist's advice in such cases very seasonable: "Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver:" Ps. l. 22.

And who would be afraid or be ashamed of Noah's singularity, to be good alone, and to be the single example of piety and virtue, that remembers that he alone, with his three sons, was saved from the deluge? and he that would be a Noah in the ark, must be a Noah in a wicked world.

But this is sufficient to justify the wisdom of providence as to Noah's flood, which put an end to the old world. And now let us take a view of the new.

Notwithstanding that late terrible example of God's power and justice in the destruction of the old world, that new generation of men began to grow very corrupt, as God foresaw they would, but resolved to try some new methods, and not to drown the world any more. When Noah had offered a burnt-offering to the Lord "of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl," after his coming out of the ark, "the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth: neither will I again smite any more every living thing, as I have done:" Gen. viii. 20, 21.

The first exploit we hear of them, was their building the tower of Babel; which story is so briefly related by Moses, that we cannot give a perfect account of the reasons and circumstances of it. The most probable account seems to be this: that Nimrod, the son of Cush and grandson of Ham, in which line true religion and piety first decayed, affecting an universal empire, to prevent the dispersion of the people, persuaded them to build a magnificent seat for his empire, which should be a centre of union for them, at what distance soever they should be forced to remove; that the whole earth should be but one kingdom, and Babel the royal palace. Had this design succeeded, the whole world would have been but one people, and the universal monarchy in the line of Ham, which would quickly have endangered as general a corruption of mankind as there was before the flood.

Let us then consider what course God took to prevent this, and the excellent wisdom of it, which we have an account of, Gen. xi. 7, 8.—That "God confounded their language, so that they could not understand one another's speech;" and by this means, "scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth, and they left off to build the city." Now, not to take notice, that this was the most ready way to people the whole earth, even the remotest corners of it, which was for the great good of mankind—found them work to do, forced them upon the invention of ingenious arts, and, by the benefit of trade and commerce, made every country, which was not wanting to itself, a little world, and every part to enjoy all the pleasures and advan-

tages of the whole: I say, besides this, it was the most likely way that could be used at that time, to prevent the universal corruption of mankind. For,

(1.) This separated the families of Shem and Japheth, from the family of Ham, where the infection was already begun; and would have spread apace by the advantage of power and empire. When Cain had slain his brother Abel, God sent him away out of Adam's family, that his presence and example might do no hurt; and if by "the daughters of men," in Gen. vi., we understand, as some good expositors do, those who descended of Cain; and by "the sons of God," the posterity of Seth, in whose family the worship of the true God was preserved, we may observe, that Moses dates the general corruption of mankind from the union of these two families; when "the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair, and took them wives of all which they chose." And had the universal empire been established in the family of Ham, and the posterity of Shem and Japheth been brought into subjection to them, as they must in a short time have been, what less could have been expected from such a union and government, but another antediluvian corruption of all flesh?

This dispersion then was necessary to prevent a general corruption; but we see in the example of Cain, that a mere local separation is no security, for they may come together again, as the sons of God and the daughters of men in process of time did.—And, therefore,

(2.) The most lasting dispersion and separation is by a confusion of languages, which hinders all intercourse and communication; at least till there be a remedy found against it by learning each other's language, which was a work of time, and was never likely to be so general as to be the means of a common intercourse. This effectually divided them at first, and would always keep nations divided, till foreign arms should give new laws, and a new language to a conquered people.

(3.) I observe farther, that the more divisions of languages were made, and the greater the dispersion was, the greater security was it against a general corruption; which is a reason not only for separating the family of Ham from the families of Shem and Japheth, but for separating them

from each other, and dividing them into smaller bodies: for the more divisions there are, whatever part were infected, the less could the corruption spread, when there was no communication between them.

(4.) This also divided mankind into several little independent monarchies, under the government of the heads of their several families; which kept all mankind under a stricter government, than if the whole world had been one great empire, which would have proved a tyrannical domination, but could have taken little care of the manners of subjects; especially if the government itself was corrupt, the whole world must be corrupt with it. But when so many distinct societies were formed, this gave them distinct interests, and made their laws and customs, the very humour and genius of the people, so different from each other, as would keep them distinct: and this would necessarily occasion mutual emulations and jealousies to rival their neighbours in riches and power; and this cannot be done without wise laws, and a strict discipline, and the encouragement of labour and industry, of liberal arts, and all social virtues, and the suppression of such vices as weaken government, and emasculate men's spirits: this effect, we know, in a great measure it had, as we learn from the earliest accounts of the Grecian commonwealths, where we meet with so many excellent laws, and such great examples of frugality, temperance, fortitude, and a generous love of their country, which may in a great measure be attributed to their mutual emulations, which taught them prudence and justice at home and abroad, and forced on them the exercise of many civil and military virtues.

It had indeed been more for the peace and quiet of the world that all mankind had been but one people, without divided interests and governments: but such a profound state of ease is apt to loosen the reins of government, and to corrupt men's minds with sloth and luxury; and therefore is no more fit for a corrupt and degenerate state, than it would have been, that the earth should have brought forth fruit of itself without human labour and industry. But jealousies and emulations, the necessity of defending themselves against potent neighbours, or the ambition to equal, or to outdo them, restrains public vices, and is a spur to virtue. Ἀγαπὴ δ' ἔρις ἥδε βροτοῖσι.

It is true, this is the occasion of many miseries to mankind, of all the calamities and desolations of war, and therefore we must consider,

(5.) That this is so far from being an objection against providence, while God keeps the sword in his own hand, that it is an admirable instrument of government, and a signal demonstration of the Divine wisdom.

God had promised, that "he would not again any more smite every living thing, as he had done." Gen. viii. 21. And yet mankind could not be governed without some restraints and punishments; and it did not become God to punish men and nations as often as they deserved it by an immediate hand; and what then could be more wisely designed, than so to order it, that if men and nations were wicked, they should scourge and punish one another?

By this means God can chastise two wicked nations by each other's swords, without destroying either: he can so lessen their numbers and exhaust their treasures, and impoverish their countries, as to force them to peace, and to reduce them to a laborious and frugal life, which will cure the wantonness and luxury of plenty and ease.

If a nation be grown incurably wicked, he can by this means destroy them, without embroiling the rest of the world; he can carry them captive into foreign countries, or make them slaves at home, and subject them to the yoke of a conqueror, who shall correct them and teach them better.

In a word, the dispersion of mankind by the confusion of languages, which divided them into distinct societies, kingdoms and commonwealths, opened a new scene of providence, with all the variety of wisdom in the government of the world. The judgment itself was miraculous, and as plain an evidence of the divine power, as the deluge itself; for to new-form a mind, to erase all its old ideas of words and sounds, and to imprint new ones on it in an instant, shows such a superior power over nature, as none but the Author of nature has; and they must have been very stupid, if this did not renew and fix the impression of a Divine power and providence. But the dispersion which this confusion of languages occasioned, and the division of mankind into distinct societies, made the exercise of many moral, civil, and military virtues, as necessary as their own pros-

perity and preservation; and if this had not so universal an effect as might have been expected, yet it prevented an universal corruption, and had a good effect in many countries, and by turns in most; that the world never wanted examples of states and kingdoms which increased and flourished under a prudent and virtuous government, nor of the ruin of flourishing states by idleness, luxury, injustice, oppression, which weakened and divided them at home, and made them an easy prey to their provoked, or to their ambitious neighbours.

But though the state of the world, as to some moral virtues, and good order and government, was much bettered by this means, yet mankind generally declined to idolatry; that the knowledge and worship of the one supreme God was in danger of being utterly lost, and the lives of men to be corrupted by the impure and filthy rites and mysteries of their religion. This required a new and more effectual remedy, and brings me to consider a new and wonderful design of the Divine wisdom for reforming the world: I mean his choosing Abraham and his posterity to be his peculiar people, whom he would govern in so visible a manner that all the world might know and fear the God of Israel.

This is a large argument and full of mysterious wisdom; but my principal intention at present is to consider it with relation to the rest of mankind, and how wisely it was designed by God to give some check to idolatry, to preserve the worship of the true God, at least in Israel, from whence in time it might be restored again, when lost in the rest of the world.

It has, I confess, a very strange appearance at first, that God should reject, or at least neglect all the rest of mankind, and choose but one family out of all the world to place his name among them; "Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles?" Rom. iii. 29. This the vain-glorious Jew imagined, who despised the rest of the world, as reprobated by God. But the apostle abhors the thoughts of it, "yes, of the Gentiles also:" and St. Peter was at length convinced by a vision, that "God was no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted by him:" Acts x.

34, 35. Thus it was from the beginning, though the Jews did not think so: and the apostles themselves at first could not easily be persuaded of it. And yet how could any man entertain honourable thoughts of God, who could conceive him so partial in his favours as to confine the peculiar expressions of his love to one nation, without any appearing concernment what became of the rest of mankind? But if this was, and was intended by God, for the general good of the world, and was admirably fitted to cure idolatry, and to restore the worship of the one supreme God, it gives us a new and more glorious prospect of the wisdom of providence. And to represent this as advantageously as I can, I shall first give you a general view of this admirable design of the Divine wisdom, which will enable us the better to understand, and to give a more intelligible and sensible account of the various providences of God towards Israel.

Now we must consider the world at that time as overrun with idolatry, as we may easily conclude when Abraham's family is charged with it. As Joshua told the people of Israel at Shechem: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor, and they served other gods:" Joshua xxiv. 2.

Now all men must confess, that it became the Divine wisdom to restore and preserve the faith and worship of the one supreme God, and to keep it alive in the world, that it might in time, though by slow degrees, prevail over idolatry and the kingdom of darkness, and reduce mankind to their natural obedience and subjection to God. And since experience had proved, that neither the creation of the world, nor the universal deluge, nor the confusion of languages, could preserve the belief of one supreme God, the maker and governor of the world. But the new world was as universally overrun with polytheism and idolatry, as the old world was with violence: and that the very dispersion of mankind, and their division into distinct kingdoms and societies, which was a good remedy against some other immoralities, had probably occasioned a multiplicity of gods, while every nation desired a god, as well as a king of their own, to protect and defend them. I say this shows what absolute necessity there was that the Divine wisdom should

find out some more effectual and lasting means to convince the world of the power and providence of one supreme God. What other effectual means God might have chosen for this purpose, does not belong to us to inquire; but it becomes us very much to contemplate the Divine wisdom in that method which he did take to reclaim the world.

Now the way God took was this. He chose Abraham and his posterity for his peculiar people, whom he governed in as visible a manner as any temporal prince governs his subjects: he forbade them to own any other God besides himself, and separated them from the rest of the world by peculiar laws and ceremonies of worship, to secure them from the idolatrous practices of their neighbours: he made himself known and distinguished himself from all other country gods, by the name of the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; not that he was only the God of that nation, as other nations had their peculiar gods, but the God of the whole world, though he was known and worshipped only in Israel; and by this name he triumphed over all the heathen gods, and wrought such signs and wonders as might have convinced all men, if they would have been convinced, that there was no God, but the God of Israel; none like him, none that could be compared to him.

Consider, then, what more sensible proof the world could possibly have of one supreme God, and of a sovereign providence, than to see a whole nation worshipping this one supreme God; which at least would not suffer them to be wholly ignorant of such a Being, but was a just reason to examine their natural notions of a Deity, and the pretences of their several gods. Especially when they see this nation planted in a particular country allotted them by their God; and the old wicked inhabitants destroyed, and driven out from before them by such a series of miracles as were an undeniable evidence of such a Divine power, as all the gods of these countries were not able to oppose. And that this nation received their laws both for worship, and polity, and conversation, immediately from God, were governed by men appointed by God, and directed in all great affairs by Divine oracles and prophets, with such a certainty of event as never failed: that while they adhered to the worship of

this one supreme God, they were always prosperous, as he promised they should be; but when they declined to idolatry, and worshipped the gods of the countries round about them, then they were either oppressed by their enemies at home, or carried captive into foreign countries. This was a visible proof, that there was a God in Israel, and such a God as would admit of no other gods, nor allow them to worship any other, but punished them severely whenever they did; and all their other gods could not help them, nor deliver them out of his hands.

This gave sufficient notice to the world of the glory and power of the God of Israel; but some will still be apt to ask, why God did not as sensibly manifest himself to all the rest of the world, as he did to Israel? why he had not his oracles and prophets in other nations? and they may, if they please, as reasonably ask, why he does not immediately inspire every particular man with a supernatural knowledge, and force the belief of his being and providence upon their minds? Or why he did not, by a miraculous power, convert the old wicked world, but destroyed them all, and preserved only that one righteous family, which had escaped the general corruption?

For much like this was the state of mankind with respect to idolatry, when God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees: there was not one nation left that worshipped the one supreme God, and him only—nay, not one family; for Terah, Abraham's father, was an idolater, and probably all the rest of the family, excepting Abraham; for though he is not expressly excepted in the text, yet neither is he necessarily included; and God's commanding him to leave his country, and his kindred, and his father's house, and his ready compliance with this command, are reasons to believe that he was the only person in the family who had preserved himself from all idolatrous worship. However, it appears that he was a man of that extraordinary piety and virtue, and so easily curable if he had been an idolater, that God thought him the fittest person to reveal himself to, and to begin a new reformation of the world. And therefore, as in the days of Noah, God destroyed all that wicked generation of men by the flood, and only preserved Noah and his sons to new-people the earth, and to instil the seeds and

principles of piety and virtue into their posterity; so the new world being now universally corrupted by idolatry, and God having promised Noah never again to destroy every living thing, as he had done, he takes another course, and in a manner creates a new people to be the worshippers of the one true God, and in them to make his own glory and power known to the world; and chose Abraham, a man of admirable faith and piety, to be the father of his new people, which should descend from his loins in his old age, not by the mere powers of nature, but by faith in God's promise. Heb. xi. 11, 12.

The plain state, then, of the case is this. When that new generation of men had universally corrupted themselves with idolatry, notwithstanding all the means God had used to possess them with a lasting sense of his being and providence, God gives them up to their wilful blindness, and leaves them to the cheats and impostures of those wicked spirits whom they had made their gods, till he could recover them from this apostasy by such methods as were agreeable to human nature, and became the Divine wisdom. The most effectual way to do this, was to establish his worship in some one nation, which should be a visible proof, both of the unity of the godhead and of a Divine providence; and because there was no such nation then in the world, he made a nation on purpose, and allotted them a country to dwell in, and signalized them by extraordinary providences, as the worshippers of the one supreme God. This was a kind of a new beginning of the world, which did not put an end to the idolatrous world, as Noah's flood put an end to that wicked generation, but yet did propagate a new generation of men in it, who should in time put an end to that universal idolatry, and make a new world of it.

And this is a new advance the Divine wisdom made towards the recovery of mankind. When Adam had sinned, he and his whole posterity became mortal, and were condemned to a laborious life, that in the sweat of their brows they should eat their bread—which was the best preservative against the temptations of ease, and sloth, and luxury. When, notwithstanding this, "all flesh had corrupted his ways," God destroyed that wicked generation with an universal deluge, and thereby gave a signal demonstration of

his power and justice to the new world. When this new generation of men grew corrupt, God confounded their language, and dispersed them over the face of the whole earth, and formed them into distinct bodies and societies, which prevented a general corruption of manners, taught them civil justice and many moral virtues, which were necessary to the support and defence of human societies; but when they all declined to idolatry, which would endanger a new and universal corruption of manners, by those impure ceremonies with which wicked spirits would choose to be worshipped, some new and more effectual means were to be used to cure this evil. The universal deluge, and the confusion of languages, had so abundantly convinced them of a Divine power and providence, that there was no such creature as an atheist known among them, till their ridiculous idolatries in worshipping the meanest creatures, and viler men, with ludicrous or abominable rites, tempted some men of wit and thought rather to own no God, than such gods as the heathens worshipped. But though these extraordinary events were a manifest proof of a Divine power and providence, yet it seems they were not thought so express and direct a proof of the unity of the godhead, at least not a sufficient argument against the worship of inferior deities, whom they supposed intrusted with the immediate care of particular countries. And how could God give a more sensible demonstration to the world, that he would not allow the paying divine honour to any but himself, than by raising up a new people, distinguished and separated from all the rest of the world, by the sole worship of the one supreme God, and owned by him for his peculiar people, by as distinguishing providences; for this not only proves a Divine power and providence, but that there is but one God whom we ought to worship.

And this may satisfy us, that God is not so partial in his favours, as to prefer one nation before all the rest of mankind; for they were no nation nor people when God chose them; for God entered into covenant with Abraham and his seed, when there was none but himself: but when all the rest of the world were idolaters, God promised to multiply Abraham's seed into a great nation, and to make them his own peculiar people; that is, he made a new people

and nation, in great kindness to mankind, to preserve the knowledge and worship of the one supreme God, and by degrees to extirpate idolatry out of the world.

But besides this, it was one of the peculiar privileges of the Jews, "that to them were committed the oracles of God:" Rom. iii. 2. And it is certain, it was for the great good of the world, that these divine oracles, a system of laws, both for religious worship and civil conversation, should be deposited somewhere; for their idolatry did every day corrupt the manners of men, and was likely in time to destroy all the natural notions of good and evil; which made a written law necessary, from whence men might learn their duty whenever they pleased; and it is evident these laws could be given to no other people but the Jews, who alone acknowledged and worshipped the one supreme God; for it is not to be conceived, that God should give laws to idolaters, who did not own and worship him for their God, or that they should receive laws from him. And though these laws were immediately given only to the Jews, because there was no other nation at that time which owned and worshipped the one supreme God, yet as the knowledge and worship of God prevailed in the world, so these laws would be of more universal use, as we see it is even to this day. Nay, even while idolatry prevailed, the writings of Moses and the prophets very much reformed the Pagan philosophy, gave them better notions of God and of religious worship, and more divine rules of life, as is visible in the philosophy of Pythagoras and Plato, who are generally thought to have learned some of their best notions from conversations with Jewish priests. But yet the question is not, what use the world did make of this? but, what use they might have made of it? And whether, as the state of the world then was, any thing could be more wisely designed, than to preserve the knowledge and worship of the one true God, and a system of divine laws, in a nation raised up on purpose to season the world, and to preserve it from an universal apostacy.

But God had a more glorious design than all this, in entering into covenant with Abraham, and choosing his seed for his peculiar people. He had promised that "the seed of the woman should break the serpent's head;" which

contains the promise of the Messias, who, in the fulness of time was to appear in the world to destroy the works of the devil. And this is the covenant which God made with Abraham, "that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed." It was not fitting that the Messias and Saviour of the world should descend from idolaters, and that when he came into the world he should find no worshippers of the one supreme God in it; and therefore God entered into covenant with Abraham, who seems to have been the only man of that age who was free from idolatry, and promises to multiply his seed, and to preserve his name and worship among them, and that the Messias should descend from his loins.

And if we consider what necessary preparations were required for the coming of the Messias, and for his reception in the world when he should appear, it will satisfy us how wisely this was designed by God. The appearance of the Son of God in the world was very surprising; and it could not be thought that any one who made such pretences should find credit, unless the world had beforehand been prepared to expect him, and had some infallible marks and characters whereby to know him when he came. And this was the principal end of all the types, and figures, and prophecies of the law, to contain the promises and predictions of the Messias, and the characters whereby to know him.

The temple itself and the whole temple worship were little more than types and figures of Christ, of his incarnation, or living among men in an earthly tabernacle, of his priesthood and sacrifice, his death, and resurrection, and ascension into heaven, there to intercede for us at God's right hand, as the high priest entered once a year into the holy of holies. Now this could not have been done, had not the one supreme God had a temple, and priesthood, and sacrifices on earth: that is, a people peculiarly devoted to his worship and service; for the temples, and priests, and sacrifices of idols could not be types of the Son of God, who came to confound all the Pagan gods and their idolatrous worship. Thus there could have been no prophecies of Christ, had there been no prophets of the true God; and these prophecies would have met with little credit had they been found in idols' temples. So that God's choosing the

posterity of Abraham for his peculiar people, was not only necessary to preserve the knowledge and worship of the one true God in the world, but also to receive and to convey down to future ages, with an unquestionable authority, all the types and prophecies of the Messias.

This gives us a general view of the Divine wisdom in that covenant God made with Abraham and his posterity; and this will enable us to discover the wonderful wisdom of all the various dispensations of the Divine providence towards the Jewish nation; which will be both so useful and entertaining a meditation, that I cannot pass it over without some short remarks.

Now God having chosen the posterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people, on purpose to make them a visible confutation of idolatry, and to establish and propagate the knowledge and worship of the one supreme God in the world, in order to effect this, four things were manifestly necessary.

(1.) That it should be visible to all that knew them, that God had chosen Israel for his peculiar people.

(2.) That it should be as visible that the God of Israel is the one supreme God, the Maker and sovereign Lord of the whole world.

(3.) That the worship of the one supreme God should be preserved entire among them; or that if they did decline to idolatry, they should be visibly punished for it.

(4.) That the fame of this people, and of their God, should by degrees be known over all the earth.

Now not to take notice of the mystical reasons of God's providences towards Israel, which is a very large and nice argument, and not so proper to my present design; if most of the remarkable providences wherewith they were exercised, did manifestly serve some one or more of these ends, we have a visible reason of them, not only sufficient to justify providence, but to give us a ravishing prospect of the Divine wisdom.

I shall begin with the removal of Jacob and his family into Egypt, the occasion of which is well known, but the reason of it is not so well considered. For it may seem strange that when God had promised Abraham to bestow the land of Canaan on his posterity for an inheritance, he

should remove them out of the land of Canaan into Egypt, there to continue many years under grievous oppression, before he thought fit to deliver them, and to give them possession of the promised land.

But to understand the wise design of this, we must remember that God was to give a visible demonstration to the world that he had chosen Israel for his peculiar people, and given them the land of Canaan for their inheritance; and it was not so agreeable to this design that they should increase insensibly in Canaan, and by degrees dispossess the old inhabitants; for there had been nothing singular and remarkable in this, and therefore they were to be a great nation before God so publicly and visibly owned them for his people, and visibly bestowed an inheritance on them; and it was necessary they should have some place to increase and multiply in, till God thought fit to transplant them into the promised land. For this purpose God chose the land of Egypt, and sent Joseph beforehand thither, and advanced him to Pharaoh's throne to prepare a reception for them. And a very quiet and easy retreat they found there for many years till Joseph was dead, and all the good offices he had done both for king and people forgot, and the prodigious increase of Israel made the kings of Egypt jealous of their numbers and power. And then they began to oppress that people with hard labour and cruel bondage, till the time appointed for their deliverance was come.

This oppression of Israel may seem a very severe providence; but there were some very wise ends it served.

(1.) To make the people willing to leave Egypt, where they suffered such hard bondage; for whoever observes how ready they were upon all occasions to talk of returning into Egypt, how they longed after the onions and garlick, and flesh-pots of Egypt, notwithstanding all the hardships they suffered there, will be apt to think that had they enjoyed ease and prosperity, all the miracles which Moses wrought would no more have persuaded Israel to have left Egypt than they could persuade Pharaoh to let them go.

(2.) The advantage Pharaoh made of the service of Israel made him obstinately resolve not to part with them; and his cruel oppression made it very just for God to punish him, and all Egypt with him, and this occasioned all those signs

and wonders which God wrought in Egypt by the hands of Moses, whereby he visibly owned Israel for his people, and made his own power and glory known.

(3.) The great proneness of Israel to idolatry, even when God had delivered them out of Egypt, is too plain a proof that they had learnt the Egyptian idolatries while they lived there; the golden calf being, as some learned men not without reason conclude, an imitation of the Egyptian Apis. And this made it very just for God to punish the Egyptian idolatry with an Egyptian bondage; especially considering that this was the most likely way to give check to their idolatry, and to make them hate the Egyptian gods like their Egyptian task-masters, and to remember the God of their fathers, and his promise and covenant to bestow the land of Canaan on them.

(4.) The oppression of Israel in Egypt was an effectual means to keep them a distinct and separate people. This was absolutely necessary, when God had chosen them for his peculiar people, that they should be preserved from incorporating with any other people. And this God took early care of, by placing them by themselves in the land of Goshen, where they grew up into a distinct body from Egypt, which made Pharaoh so jealous of them when they began to multiply. And that made him oppress them, and that oppression preserved the distinction which a kind and friendly usage might in time have destroyed. For it is rarely seen that two people can live amicably together in the same country, and under the same prince, without mingling and incorporating with each other, till they forget all distinction between nations and families.

These are wise reasons why God suffered the hard bondage of Israel in Egypt; and those mighty signs and wonders which God wrought in Egypt, were the most effectual means both to convince the Israelites of God's peculiar care of them, and to convince the world, that Israel was God's peculiar people, and that the God of Israel was the supreme Lord and governor of the world. This account God himself gives of it: Exod. vi. 6—8: "Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.——And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: And ye shall

know that I am the Lord your God which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." And as for the Egyptians, God tells Moses, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them:" Exod. vii. 3—5.

This is the first time we read of such signs and wonders as these, and probably they are the first miracles of this nature that ever were wrought; and it becomes us to contemplate the wisdom of providence in it, for the wisdom of miracles, and the surprise and wonder of them, are two very different things. Miracles offer violence to the order of nature, and would be no commendation of the wisdom of providence should we consider them as causes, not as signs. It would be a reproach to the wisdom of providence to say, that God wrought all those miracles in Egypt, because he could not have punished the Egyptians, nor have delivered Israel without them. For it would argue a great defect in the ordinary methods of government, if God could not at any time save good men, and punish and destroy the wicked, without a miracle. God can do whatever he pleases by the wise direction and government of natural and moral causes, and therefore does not work miracles because he needs them to supply the defects of natural powers, but to bear testimony to his own being and providence, and to give authority to his ministers and prophets; and we must learn the wisdom of this from the state and condition of the world at that time.

Mankind were at that time so far from being atheists that they would worship any thing, the meanest and most contemptible creatures, rather than have no god; and they were so sensible how much they stood in need of a Divine providence, that one god would not serve them, but they wanted as many gods, not only as there were nations, but as they had wants to supply. This was a great corruption of the light of nature, and those notions of one supreme God imprinted on their minds, and proclaimed by the whole visible creation;

but yet was so universal and prevailing, that their wisest philosophers, who had better notions of the Deity, were not able to resist the torrent, and durst not openly oppose the worship of those country gods, for fear of a popular rage and fury.

Now when neither the light of nature, nor the works of creation, and of a common providence, could secure the belief and worship of the one supreme God, what remained but for God to make some more sensible manifestation of himself to the world? and let any man consider what more effectual way could have been taken to convince men of the Divine power and providence than by miracles, especially such miracles as are for the deliverance and protection of good men and the punishment and overthrow of the wicked.

When the corruption of mankind is such that they will not learn from nature, there is no way of teaching them but by something which is supernatural. And when the beautiful, and regular, and uniform order of nature will not convince men that there is a God, at least not that there is one supreme God, who made and who governs this world, miracles will. Those who will not believe that the world was made, or had any wise and intelligent cause, must confess that miracles have a cause, because they see them produced; and that that cause is not nature, because they see them produced without any natural cause, or against the laws of nature; nor chance and accident, because they are done at the command of a free agent, at the word of a man; as all the signs and wonders in Egypt were wrought at the word of Moses, whose word had no natural virtue and efficacy in it to work wonders. And therefore miracles certainly prove, that there is an invisible, intelligent cause, who, if he did not make the world, could have made it if he had pleased. For whoever can in any one instance act without or against nature, can create nature too. For to do any thing which nature cannot do, is in that particular to make nature; and he who can make nature in one instance, can do so in all; and this is a good reason to believe that the world was made, when we know that there is a cause that can make the world. And that superior power he exercises over nature proves that he both can and does govern the world; for he has the supreme and absolute government of nature, who can, when he pleases, give new powers to it, or suspend and reverse its laws.

So that miracles are a supernatural proof of a Divine power and providence; and no man who believes, that there ever was a true miracle wrought, can be an atheist; and therefore it is no wonder that atheists are such professed enemies to the belief of miracles; but it is a great wonder that they can persuade themselves to reject all those authentic relations we have of miracles, both from the law of Moses, and from the gospel of Christ, which are the most credible histories in the world, [if we look upon them as no more than histories,] and have obtained the most universal belief. Especially this is very unaccountable in those men who pretend to deism, to acknowledge a God who made the world: for cannot that God who made the world, and made nature, act without, or above, or against nature, when he pleases? And may it not become the Divine wisdom and goodness to do this, when it is necessary for the more abundant conviction of mankind, who are sunk into atheism or idolatry? When signs and wonders are necessary to awaken men into the sense and belief of God and his providence, which was the case in the days of Moses; or to give authority to prophets to declare and reveal the will of God to men, which was a reason for miracles as long as God thought fit to make any new and public revelations of his will; when it is reasonable and credible, that God, who can, when he pleases, should sometimes work miracles, as it is that he should take care to preserve the knowledge of himself and his will, and to restore it when it is lost; or to make such new discoveries of his grace, as the fallen state of mankind requires; when, I say, the thing itself is so credible, and so worthy of God, what reasonable pretence can there be for rejecting miracles, for which we have the authority of the best-attested history in the world?

But atheism was not the disease of that age, which had run into the other extreme of polytheism and idolatry; and, therefore, though miracles do prove the being and providence of God, the miracles of Moses were principally intended to prove the glory and power of the God of Israel; that the God of Israel is the one supreme God, and that he had chosen Israel for his peculiar people; and this he did by doing such things as no other God could do; such as made the Egyptian magicians confess that it was "the finger of God;" (Exod. viii. 1,) and what more effectual way could be taken

to convince the world of one supreme God than such visible demonstrations of an absolute and sovereign power superior to all? Those who worshipped a plurality of gods, either had no notion of one supreme God, whose power ruleth over all; or if they had, yet they believed that this supreme God had committed the care and government of mankind to inferior deities, whom they therefore worshipped with divine honours, as the disposers of their lives and fortunes; and either paid no worship to the supreme God, which was the more general practice; or worshipped their country gods together with him, and that with the most frequent, most solemn, and pompous worship. Now such great and wonderful works as these, which none of their country gods could do, was an evident proof that there was a power, and therefore a God above them all, whom all mankind ought to fear and worship. This convinced Nebuchadnezzar of the power of the God of Israel, when he had delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace; he made a decree, "That every people, nation, and language which spake amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill, because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort:" Dan. iii. 29. Thus when God had delivered Daniel from the lion's den, Darius made a decree, "That in every dominion of his kingdom men should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: For he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and worketh signs and wonders in heaven, and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions:" Dan. iii. 26, 27.

Both these kings were convinced by these great and wonderful works, that the God of Israel was the supreme God; but Nebuchadnezzar's decree only forbids men to blaspheme God. Darius seems to command all people to worship him; for, to "tremble and fear before him," signifies a religious veneration; but neither of them appointed any solemn worship to be paid him, much less did they forbid the worship of any other gods.

But a little consideration would have carried them farther,

for these mighty works, which proved a power superior to all gods, proved a sovereign providence too; that this supreme God had not so committed the government of the world to any ministers or inferior deities, but that he reserved the supreme disposal of all things in his own hands—as Nebuchadnezzar was convinced, that "his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation; and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him what doest thou?" Dan. iv. 34, 35. This cut off all reasonable pretences of paying Divine worship to their country gods; for if there be a superior power and providence over them, at most they could be only ministers of the Divine will, and therefore could have no title to Divine honours, no more than ministers of state have to the royal dignity. And it was very reasonable to conclude this, when they saw that this supreme God would not suffer Israel, whom he had chosen for his peculiar people, to worship any other God besides himself. This was not unknown to the Egyptians, but was more manifest in after ages, when God so severely punished them for their idolatry; and was made evident to Nebuchadnezzar and Darius when God delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego out of the fiery furnace, who refused to worship the golden image which he had set up; and delivered Daniel from the power of the lions, when he was cast into the lions' den for praying to his God. This shows the strange power of prejudice and custom; but yet we must confess that this was wisely designed by God for the cure of polytheism and idolatry.

Having thus vindicated and explained the wisdom of providence, both with respect to the removal of Israel out of the land of Canaan into Egypt, and the hard bondage they suffered there; and their deliverance out of Egypt with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, with signs, and wonders, and miracles. Let us now follow them into the wilderness.

God having chosen Israel for his peculiar people, and delivered them out of Egypt before he showed them openly to the world under such a peculiar character, it was necessary first to form their manners, to take care that they should own him for their God, and behave themselves as it became so

glorious a relation. This could not be done in Egypt, where they were oppressed by hard bondage; and therefore God first leads them into the wilderness, remote from the conversation of all other people, and upon all accounts a fit place both to instruct and try them. I do not intend, as I said before, to inquire into the mystical reasons of those various providences with which God exercised them in the wilderness, to which our Saviour and his apostles so often refer, and which they apply to the gospel state; but shall only consider the wisdom of providence, as to the external and visible conduct of that people, to make them fit to be owned before all the world for his peculiar people.

They had lived two hundred years in Egypt, and were tinctured with the idolatries, and had learnt the corrupt manners of that people, and had all the meanness and stupidity and perverseness of humour that a state of servitude and bondage is apt to create; of which we have too many visible instances in their behaviour towards Moses. All this was to be corrected before their entrance into Canaan, which will give us the reasons of some very wonderful providences.

The first remarkable thing to this purpose to be observed, is God's delivering the law to them with all the most formidable solemnities in an audible voice from Mount Sinai—which, Moses tells them, was such a thing as was never known before, "since the day that God created man upon the earth. Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?" Deut. iv. 32, 33. And the use Moses makes of it is very natural, to confirm them in the belief and worship of the one supreme God. "Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God—there is none else besides him. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee; and upon earth he showed thee his great fire, and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire.——Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath—there is none else:" Deut. iv. 35, 36, 39. For what can convince men that there is one supreme God, if such a terrible appearance as that on Mount Sinai, and the law delivered in an audible voice from heaven, will not convince them? Numa pretended to receive his laws from

the goddess Ægeria, as some other lawgivers pretended to do the like—but no man knew any thing of it but themselves. But here a whole nation heard God speak to them, and saw such an appearance upon the Mount as made Moses himself fear and tremble. I desire any man to tell me how God, who is a pure invisible mind, could possibly give a more visible demonstration of his presence and power? I desire the wittiest and most philosophical atheists, only for experiment's sake, to suppose the truth of that relation which Moses gives us of this matter, and that they themselves had been present at Mount Sinai—had seen the smoke and fire cover the mountain—had heard the thunder and the trumpet—and, at last, a voice delivering the law with an inimitable terror and majesty,—what would they then have thought of this? or what farther evidence would they have desired that it was God who spoke to them? This could be no dream, nor melancholy apparition, or disturbed fancy; for they had timely notice of it three days before, and were commanded to sanctify themselves to meet their God: and if a whole nation had been imposed on after such fair warning, it had been as great a prodigy and miracle as the appearance on Mount Sinai, and would have argued some divine and supernatural infatuation, and that would have proved a God.

This, then, was as visible a demonstration as could be given of the presence, and power, and majesty of God, who rejected all other gods from any share in his worship, and declares himself to be the maker of heaven and earth; for I am sure that the wit of man cannot invent a more effectual conviction than this.

Let us then consider the wisdom of providence in this, both with respect to the Israelites and to the rest of mankind.

"He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." And therefore, when God intended to restore his own worship again in the world, and to make Israel a pattern and example of it to the rest of mankind, it was necessary to give them as visible and ocular a demonstration of the power and glory of God as it was possible for creatures to have. When the whole world was overrun with idolatry, and the Israelites themselves so strongly inclined to it, nothing less than such an appearance from Mount Sinai was likely to establish the

faith and worship of the one supreme God—and we see that this itself could very hardly do it; for immediately after they had heard God speak to them, while Moses was in the Mount, they made them a golden calf and worshipped it; and as soon as they mingled with any other people they joined in their idolatrous worship—a sad example of which we have seen in their worship of Baal-Peor: Numb. xxv. But this was the highest evidence God could then give them of his power and glory, and it did in time prevail; and in them all mankind who know their story have a visible demonstration of one supreme God.

But not to insist on every particular, which would be endless, it may seem strange that when God brought Israel out of Egypt to give them possession of the promised land, he should make them wander in the wilderness forty years, till all that generation of men which came out of Egypt were dead, excepting Joshua and Caleb. The apostle to the Hebrews gives us the general account of this matter, Heb. iii. 7, to the end, which resolves it into their idolatry and infidelity. "Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart: and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest." Which he makes an admonition to Christians, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God;" that is, in forsaking the true God, and declining to idolatry, as the Israelites in the wilderness did. "And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

The plain state of the case is this: that generation of men which came out of Egypt, and remembered the customs and practices of that people, were so strangely addicted to idolatry, that all the signs and wonders they saw in Egypt, in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, could not perfectly cure them; but whenever they had opportunity, they joined themselves to the heathen gods, ate of their sacrifices, and bowed

themselves before them; that had these men gone into Canaan, which was then a land of idolaters, they would certainly have worshipped their gods instead of destroying them, and have mingled themselves with the people of the land, and have learned their manners. For they who so often tempted God, and disobeyed Moses while they were in the wilderness, in expectation of the promised land, what would they have done had they been once possessed of it? So that to have given that generation of men possession of Canaan, would not have answered God's original design in choosing Israel for his peculiar people; for in all likelihood they would have proved a nation of idolaters, like the other nations round about them. And therefore God deferred the final accomplishment of his promise till that generation was all dead, and a new generation sprung up which knew not Egypt, nor had conversed with idolatrous nations, but had seen the wonders of God in the wilderness, and had learnt his statutes and judgments, and were sufficiently warned by the example of their fathers, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, to fear and reverence the Lord Jehovah, and to make him their trust. This is the very account the Scripture gives of it; and thus accordingly it proved; for that new generation of men were never charged with idolatry. But we are expressly told, that "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel:" Josh. xxiv. 31.

All this, we see, was designed by God with admirable wisdom to make his own glory and power known, and to publish his choice of Israel for his peculiar people, and to prepare them for himself, and to establish his name and worship among them. And now God had made them fit inhabitants of the land of promise, without any longer delay he gives them the actual possession of it; and therefore let us now follow them into the land of Canaan.

The history of the wars of Canaan is sufficiently known, which presents us with new wonders and miracles not inferior to those which God wrought in Egypt and in the Red Sea; for God so visibly fought the battles of Israel, that they and all the world might know that it was he that gave them possession of that good land, and drove out those wicked in-

habitants before them—which declared his glory, and made his power known. And what I have already discoursed concerning the wonders and miracles in Egypt is equally applicable to this, and I need add no more. Let us then consider Israel in possession of the land of promise; and there are but two things more I shall observe in the Jewish history till the coming of our Saviour,

(1.) Their frequent relapses into idolatry, for which they were as frequently and severely punished.

(2.) Their captivities and dispersions among the nations, whereby God made himself and his laws more universally known in the world.

(1.) As for the first, nothing could be more directly contrary to God's original intention in choosing the posterity of Abraham for his peculiar people, than their falling into idolatry; and yet God foresaw that this they would do, and threatens to punish them severely when they did—which is the subject of Moses' prophetic song. Deut. xxxii. And the whole history of the Jewish nation may satisfy us that though God spared them many times when they were guilty of other great sins, yet they never fell into idolatry but vengeance soon pursued them, and they were either oppressed by their enemies at home, or carried captive into foreign countries. When Joshua was dead, and all that generation which Joshua led into Canaan, "there arose another generation after them, that knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel;" and they soon declined to idolatry, "and served Baalim: they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth:" Judges ii. 10—12, &c. And what follows gives us a summary account of God's dealings with them all the time of the judges. "And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about them. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned

quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so. And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hands of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. And it came to pass when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way."

For this reason, as it follows in the text, God resolved "not to drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died." God had promised "to put out those nations by little and little, not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field should increase upon them." Deut. vii. 22. But, withal, Joshua assured them, that "if they did in any wise go back," that is, relapse into idolatry, "and cleave unto the remnant of those nations, even those which remain among you," which Joshua has not driven out, "know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you." Joshua xxiii. 12, 13. And thus accordingly God dealt with them; for he left "the five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites, that dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-Hermon, unto the entering in of Hamath, and they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses." Judges iii. 1, 4.

This was a wise provision God made to correct and punish Israel, whenever they should decline to idolatry; for these idolatrous nations, who still lived among them, or round about them, were not more ready to tempt them to idolatry, than they were to oppress and afflict them, when God thought fit to chastise Israel. The whole book of Judges is a manifest proof of this; and the story is so well known that I need not insist on particulars. Let us then briefly contemplate

the wisdom of providence in those severe judgments God executed on Israel for their frequent idolatries. God had chosen Israel for his peculiar people, to be the worshippers of the one supreme God, and a visible confutation of the heathen idolatries; but their great propensity to idolatry, after all the signs and wonders which God wrought in Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, and in giving them possession of the promised land, did threaten the final apostasy of Israel, which would have defeated God's wise and gracious design in choosing them for his peculiar people. For had they turned idolaters like the rest of the nations, the worship of the one supreme God had been totally lost in the world.

To prevent this, God never suffered their idolatries for any long time to escape unpunished; and if we would understand the true reason of this, we must not consider these judgments merely as the punishment of their idolatries, but as the wise methods of providence to preserve his own worship among them notwithstanding their idolatrous inclinations, and to make his name, and power, and glory known to the world.

The whole world were idolaters; but God did not punish other nations for their idolatry, as he did Israel; which shows, that the punishment of Israel was not merely for the punishment of idolatry, but for the cure of it. For God having chosen Israel for his peculiar people, the world was to learn from them, from their examples, and from their rewards and punishments, the knowledge and worship of the one supreme God. And could there be a more sensible confutation of idolatry, than to see a nation which had been visibly consecrated to the worship of the one supreme God, as visibly punished, whenever they declined to idolatry?

That new generation which sprung up after the days of Joshua, who had not seen God's wonders in Egypt and in the wilderness, nor known the wars of Canaan, soon forgot the God of their fathers, and wanted some new experiments of God's power and presence among them; and whenever they declined to idolatry, God took care they should not want them, though they paid very dear for them; for he delivered them into the hands of their enemies, and brought many evils on them, till they should remember the God of their

fathers. This account God himself gives of it, Deut. xxxi. 16, 17: "And the Lord said unto Moses, behold thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers, whither they go to be amongst them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, are not these evils come upon us because the Lord our God is not amongst us?" This the Psalmist tells us was the effect of such judgments, though not always so lasting as it ought to have been. "When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God; and they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer:" Ps. lxxviii. 34, 35.

By these means God made them sensible of his justice and power, and reclaimed them from their idolatries, and restored his own worship among them; for they certainly knew, by the threatenings of their own law, for what reasons they were thus punished. And indeed their own experience was sufficient to satisfy them in this; for they no sooner forsook the God of their fathers, and worshipped other gods, but they were oppressed by their enemies; and when they repented of their idolatries and returned to God, he raised up saviours and deliverers who vanquished their enemies, and restored them to liberty and peace. Especially since those wonderful deliverances which God wrought for them by the hands of their judges, gave that generation of men which knew not the wars of Canaan new and visible proofs of God's power and presence among them. And we know not what effect this discipline had; it did not wholly prevent their idolatries, which they were prone to, when the memory of such judgments were worn out by a long peace and prosperity; but then the repetition of such judgments, as they repeated their provocations, joined with the admonitions of their prophets, whom God raised up in several ages, did generally bring them to repentance, and restore the worship of God amongst them; till at last the ten tribes grew incurable, and were therefore utterly rejected by God, and carried into a perpetual captivity, never to return more into

their own land. And Judah, who would not take warning by the punishment of Israel, was carried captive into Babylon for seventy years; which so perfectly cured their idolatry that we hear no more complaints of that after their return from captivity.

And this answered God's design with respect to the rest of the world, as much as if they had never been guilty of idolatry. For notwithstanding their several relapses into idolatry, it was well known that Israel was consecrated to the worship of the Lord Jehovah; and when the nations round about were witnesses of God's judgments against Israel when they forsook the Lord their God, and of their happy and prosperous state while they kept his covenant, it was a convincing proof of the power and justice of the God of Israel, especially when they should see the ten tribes utterly rooted out for their idolatry, and Judah carried captive into Babylon, and the city and temple of Jerusalem destroyed, and the land laid waste and desolate without inhabitants; the justice and power of God in driving them out of their land would then be as much taken notice of as his wonderful providence in delivering them out of Egypt, and placing them in that good land, was. As God himself tells Solomon in answer to his prayer at the dedication of the temple, 2 Chron. vii. 19—22: "But if ye turn away and forsake my statutes and my commandments which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods and worship them; then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb, and a by-word among all nations; and this house which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it, so that he shall say, why hath the Lord done thus unto this land, and unto this house? And it shall be answered, because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them; therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them."

For we must observe, that God had as well chosen the land of Canaan to be the seat of his worship, as Israel to be his worshippers: and the inheritance of the land of Canaan

was bestowed on them in virtue of God's covenant to be their God, and they to be his people; that is, that they should worship no other gods besides him; and the breach of covenant on their part by declining to idolatry was a forfeiture of their right to the promised land; and a proper punishment of it was, either oppression at home, which made them servants and strangers in their own land, or captivity in foreign countries. And this was so publicly known, that when any such evils befell Israel, the nations round about were able to give the reason of it, "because they forsook the Lord God of their fathers." So that the very oppression and captivity of Israel published the supreme power and glory of the God of Israel, who is a jealous God, and will admit of no partners in worship. But when his own people "forsake him, and serve strange gods in the land" which he had given them and separated to his own worship, he makes them "serve strangers in a land which is not theirs:" Jer. v. 19.

(2.) These captivities and dispersions of Israel, especially the long captivity of Judah in Babylon, served other ends besides the punishment and the cure of their idolatry; for into what country soever they were carried captive, they carried the knowledge of the God of Israel along with them.

While they lived at home in their own country, and had little commerce with any other people, the very name of Israel was known only to their neighbours; and the God of Israel could be known no farther than Israel was. But when they were carried captive to Babylon, and dispersed through all the provinces of that vast empire, this spread the knowledge of God too, who by many wonderful providences owned these captives for his people, and made the heathens see and confess his glory and power.

But the better to understand this, we must consider that wise preparation God made for it in those great revolutions of state and empires which began about this time.

To prevent the general corruption of mankind, as I observed before, God confounded their languages, and thereby separated them from each other, and formed them into several distinct independent societies and kingdoms; which was an effectual means to prevent the spreading of the infection, and to force them to the practice of a great many

moral and political virtues. But when the whole world was corrupted by idolatry, and God saw a proper season to begin a reformation, to make the cure more easy and universal, it was necessary to establish a more general communication among mankind, which is the most effectual means to spread a wholesome as well as a pestilential contagion. And since commerce and traffic was not so general in those days as it is now, there was no such ready way to do this as by force of arms, which united a great many kingdoms and nations into one; which, besides all other advantages, conveyed the knowledge of all memorable actions into all parts of the empire.

Now in the beginning of these great empires, (for though the Assyrian monarchy began long before, yet Nebuchadnezzar was the golden head of that image which represented the four monarchies,) God carried Judah captive into Babylon, and thereby made himself known to be the supreme and sovereign Lord of the world, over all the Babylonish empire.

The first occasion God took to make himself known in Babylon, was Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which he had forgot; and none of the magicians, or astrologers, or sorcerers, or Chaldeans, could show the king his dream, much less tell him the interpretation of it; but Daniel did both; which made Nebuchadnezzar acknowledge to Daniel, "of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since thou couldst reveal this secret:" Dan. ii. 47. And this advanced Daniel to great authority, for the king "made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon." And we need not doubt but he used his authority, especially among the wise men of Babylon, who had the greatest influence upon others, to propagate the knowledge of the one supreme God among them.

In the reign of the same king, God magnified his power in the preservation of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, from the fiery furnace; which occasioned a decree that gave great advantage to the Jews, and disposed all men to think very honourably of their God: "That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces,

and their house shall be made a dunghill, because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort:" Dan. iii. 28, 29. And that experience Nebuchadnezzar had of the power and justice of God in his own person, extorted from him as devout praises of God, and as orthodox a confession of faith in him, as any Jew could have made. Dan. iv.

Thus, in the reign of Belshazzar, who, with his princes, his wives, and concubines, drank wine out of the golden vessels of the temple, God gave a glorious testimony to himself, by a handwriting on the wall, which, as Daniel expounded it, and the event that very night confirmed, foretold the immediate overthrow of his empire by the Medes and Persians. This was a very sudden vengeance for their idolatrous revels, and the profanation of the holy vessels of the temple, as Daniel very freely acquainted the king: Dan. v. And though his advancement by Belshazzar, who made him the third ruler in the kingdom, was but of a very short continuance, the king being slain that night; yet it so recommended him to Darius, who began the second monarchy of the Medes and Persians, that he advanced Daniel to the same or greater honour and power, he being made the first of the three presidents who had the government of the hundred and twenty princes whom Darius set over the whole kingdom.

In the beginning of this new monarchy, God gave a fresh demonstration of his power, in delivering Daniel from the lions' den; for which reason Darius made a decree, "That in every dominion of his kingdom, men fear and tremble before the God of Daniel:" Dan. vi. 25—27. So that by the captivity of Judah, God made himself known over all the Babylonian and Persian monarchy; and this disposed Cyrus, the seventy years of their captivity being accomplished, to give them liberty to return into their own country, and to publish a decree for the rebuilding of the city and temple of Jerusalem.

But still to preserve the knowledge of God among them, the Divine providence so ordered it that when all had liberty to return, great numbers stayed behind in Babylon, where they freely professed and exercised their religion; which, together with the civil dependence of the Jewish state on the Persian monarchy, preserved a constant correspondence

and intercourse between them; and that preserved the knowledge of the Jews, and of their God.

The Grecian empire, which put an end to the Persian, made the God of the Jews still more known to the world. Alexander the Great came to Jerusalem, treated the Jews with great kindness, consulted the records of their prophets, offered sacrifices to God, and not only confirmed their old, but granted new privileges to them. And thus God became known, not only to the Babylonian and Persian, but to the Grecian monarchy. And when, after Alexander's death, the empire was divided, this caused a new dispersion of the Jews, especially into Syria and Egypt. Ptolemy, the king of Egypt, having surprised Jerusalem, carried great numbers of them into Egypt; and having entertained a kind opinion of them there, employed them in his armies and garrisons, and made them citizens of Alexandria. His son, Ptolemy Philadelphus, procured the translation of their law into Greek, which was a new publication of their religion; and after this, Onias built a temple in Egypt, in all things like to that of Jerusalem, where they worshipped God according to the rites of the Jewish law; that God was now as much known in Egypt as he was in Judea.

And to let pass a great many other things, which contributed very much to propagate the knowledge of the God of Israel in the world—to complete all, the power and oppressions of the Assyrian monarchs forced the Jews to pray the alliance and assistance of the Romans, which ended, as such powerful alliances very often do, in their subjection to the Roman powers, who first governed them by kings and tetrarchs, and at last reduced them into a Roman province. And thus the Jews, and their God, and their religion, became known over all the Roman empire. These four successive monarchies did gradually increase and spread the knowledge of one supreme God over all the world, and thereby prepared the way for the kingdom of the Messias—that kingdom which the prophet Daniel tells us, "the God of heaven would set up, which should never be destroyed:" Dan. ii. 44.

For the better to understand this, we must observe, that though the knowledge of God made no public reformation of the Pagan idolatries, yet it greatly disposed men to receive

the gospel when it should be preached to them: it visibly reformed their philosophy, and gave them the notion of one Supreme Being, as is evident from the poets and philosophers of those ages, though they still worshipped their country gods: it gave them some obscure knowledge of the Jewish prophecies concerning the kingdom of the Messias, and raised an expectation even among the Romans, of some great Prince who was to rise in the East, as Tacitus observes. And though the knowledge of the God of Israel did not reform nations, yet we have reason to believe that it made a great many private converts, who secretly forsook the idolatries of their countries, and worshipped the only true God. It is reasonable to think that it should do so, and we must confess it was wisely designed by God for that purpose; and some few examples of this kind, which we know, may satisfy us that there were many more.

On the famous day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost descended on the apostles in a visible appearance of "cloven tongues like as of fire," there were at Jerusalem great numbers, not only of Jews, but of proselytes out of every nation: "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians:" Acts ii. 9—11. Whether these were circumcised or uncircumcised proselytes is not said; but proselytes they were out of all these nations, who came up at the feast to worship at Jerusalem; from whence we learn that the dispersion of the Jews into all nations made great numbers of proselytes, who either undertook the observation of the Mosaical law by circumcision, and became Jews, or at least renounced all the heathen idolatries, and worshipped no other god but the God of Israel.

The number of these last seems to have been much greater than that of circumcised proselytes; and if we believe some learned men, there is frequent mention made of them in Scripture under the name of "worshipping Greeks, and devout men, and those which feared God." When St. Paul preached at Thessalonica, there consorted with Paul and Silas "of the devout Greeks a great multitude:" Acts xvii. 4. The very name of Greeks proved them to be Gentiles,

not Jews, who are always distinguished from each other; and that they were σεβομένοι, devout or worshipping Greeks, proves that they were the worshippers of the God of Israel; for that title is never given in Scripture to idolaters, and their frequenting the Jewish synagogue sufficiently proves it: for no Gentiles resorted thither but those who worshipped the God of Israel. Of this number was Lydia, (Acts xvi. 14,) and Cornelius, the Roman centurion, who was not only a devout man, and one who feared God himself, but all his family were so too; (Acts x. 2,) and the eunuch, (Acts viii. 27;) and almost in every place where St. Paul preached the gospel, we find great numbers of these worshipping Gentiles; at Thessalonica and Philippi, as you have seen: at Corinth, (Acts xviii. 4,) at Antioch of Pisidia, (Acts xiii. 43,) and we have reason to conclude that thus it was in other places, which shows what a great effect the dispersion of the Jews into all these countries had in making proselytes, some to the Jewish religion, but many more to the worship of the God of Israel, which prepared them to receive the gospel when it was preached to them. For they were the worshippers of the true God, and were instructed in the law and the prophets, as appears from their frequenting the Jewish synagogues, and therefore were in expectation of the Messias, and were capable of understanding the Scripture proofs of the Christian faith. It is certain the first Gentile converts were of this sort of men, who more readily embraced the faith than the Jews themselves; for they had all the preparations for Christianity which the Jews had, but none of their prejudices; neither a fondness for their ceremonial worship, nor for the temporal kingdom of the Messias. And therefore a very learned man* expounds that text; Acts xiii. 48: "As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed;" of these devout and worshipping Gentiles, that they were τεταγμένοι, ready disposed and prepared to receive the doctrine of eternal life by Christ Jesus.

And thus we are come to the days of Christ, whose appearance in the world was the last and most effectual means God used for the recovery of mankind. To consider the Divine wisdom in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, relates to the wisdom of the Christian religion, not

* Mr. Joseph Mede's third discourse on Acts xvii. 4.

of providence, and therefore does not concern my present argument; but if we take a brief review of what I have said, we may the better understand in what sense Christ is said to come in "the fulness of time," for he came as soon as the world was prepared to receive him. For I would desire any man who complains that the coming of Christ was too long delayed, to tell me in what sooner period it had been proper for him to appear?

In every age, as I have already shown, God took the wisest methods that the condition of mankind at that time would allow to reform the world. And if Christ appeared at such a time, as the Divine wisdom saw most fit and proper for his appearance, he appeared as soon as he could, if we will allow God to dispense his grace and favours wisely. That he did so, no man can doubt who believes the wisdom and goodness of God. But my business at present is to give you a fair representation of all those wise advances God made to this last completing and stupendous act of grace and love. God had promised our first parents immediately upon the fall, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head;" and by virtue of this promise, all truly good men were saved by Christ, from the beginning of the world. But the more to recommend the love of God, in the incarnation and death of our Saviour, it seems very congruous to the Divine wisdom that all other methods should be first tried for the reforming of mankind, before the coming of Christ; and that he should come in such a time when the world was best prepared to receive him; and as little as we understand of the unsearchable counsels of God, it may satisfy us, that upon both these accounts Christ appeared in "the fulness of time."

When "all flesh had corrupted his ways," and there was but one righteous family left, the only probable means of restoring piety and virtue to the world, was to destroy all that wicked generation of men, and to preserve that righteous family to new-people the world.

When that new generation began to corrupt themselves, God separated them from each other by confounding their languages; and formed them into distinct societies and kingdoms, which was the most effectual way to stop the infection, and to force on them the practice of many moral and civil virtues.

When, notwithstanding this, they all declined to idolatry, God chose Abraham and his posterity to be his peculiar people, to preserve the faith and worship of the one supreme God in the world: he gave them his laws, committed to them the types and prophecies of the Messias, and punished them very severely when they worshipped any other gods—sent them into captivity, and by various providences scattered them almost over the face of the whole earth, and thereby propagated the knowledge of himself and of his laws, and the prophecies of the Messias—made numerous proselytes to the worship of the one supreme God, and "made ready a people prepared for the Lord," and then Christ came. And whatever sooner time you fix on for the appearance of Christ, you will find it either before God had tried all other methods for reforming the world, or before the world was prepared for the receiving of Christ.

And having thus, in the best manner I could, represented to you the wonderful wisdom of providence, from the beginning of the world to the appearance of Christ in the flesh, in some of the most remarkable events which have happened, I shall here break off; for though the wisdom of providence is not less wonderful in those various events which have happened to the Christian church, yet that is so large a subject, and the accounts of many things so imperfect or doubtful, that I shall leave it to men of greater leisure, and better skill and judgment in secular and ecclesiastical history. But, I hope, that the imperfect account I have now given, will teach you to reverence, not to censure the wisdom of providence; for if we, who understand so little of God's ways, can see such excellent wisdom in them, what unsearchable depths and mysteries of wisdom are there which we cannot discover!

But yet, to complete the Jewish history as far as the Scripture account goes, it will be necessary to take notice of the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, which put an end to their state and government, and dispersed them into so many different countries; for it seems very surprising, that God should cast off his people, who were in covenant with him, and to whom the promises of the Messias were peculiarly made, so soon after the appearance of the Messias in the world.

And therefore, to vindicate both the truth and faithfulness of God's promise to Abraham, and the wisdom of his providence in the final overthrow and dispersion of the Jewish nation, we must distinguish, as St. Paul frequently does, especially in Rom. ix., between the carnal and the spiritual seed of Abraham—the children of the flesh and the children of the promise—those who descended from Abraham by carnal generation, and those who were the children of Abraham by faith in Christ Jesus. Gal. iii. 26, 29.

The carnal posterity of Abraham were chosen by God for his peculiar people, to preserve his own name and worship among them; and for this purpose they were to be a distinct nation, separated from the rest of the world, and had the land of Canaan given them to live in; and they were to continue so till the coming of the Messias, according to Jacob's prophecy: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and to him shall the gathering of the people be:" Gen. xlix. 10.

But the blessings of the Messias were promised only to the spiritual seed of Abraham, as St. Paul proves. Rom. ix.; Gal. iii. That is, to all those, whether Jews or Gentiles, who believe in Christ Jesus; for Christ was the true promised seed, and in Christ are all the promises of God, yea and amen; and therefore nothing but faith in Christ can entitle us to the promise of Abraham, as the apostle, in these places, confirms by several arguments, which I cannot now insist on.

Now if we thus distinguish between Abraham's carnal and spiritual seed, and those promises which belong to Abraham's carnal posterity, and those which peculiarly belong to his spiritual seed, there will appear no great difficulty in God's destroying the city and temple of Jerusalem, and dispersing the Jews into all parts of the earth.

God had accomplished what he intended by the carnal posterity of Abraham; that is, he had preserved and propagated the knowledge of the one true God in the world, and prepared men to receive Christ when he should be preached to them; and now Christ was come, the spiritual covenant took place, which was not confined to Abraham's carnal posterity, but extended to all that believed in Christ all the world over. So that God had no longer any one

nation for his peculiar people; but those only were his peculiar people, whatever nation they were of, who believed in Jesus.

The Jews then, considered as Abraham's carnal posterity, were God's peculiar people no longer; nor did God's promise oblige him to preserve them a distinct nation any longer; and therefore the Divine providence might now as justly destroy them as any other nation, if they deserved it, and certainly the crucifixion of their Messias, and their obstinate infidelity, did deserve it. And when they had thus justly deserved a final excision, the Divine wisdom had admirable ends to serve by it.

This gave a glorious testimony to Christ and his religion in that terrible vengeance which befell his murderers, which Christ himself had so expressly and punctually foretold, that no man who knew what he had foretold with so many particular circumstances, could be ignorant why Jerusalem was destroyed.

The obstinate infidelity of the Jews, who blasphemed the name, and persecuted the disciples of Christ, did in some degree hinder the progress of the gospel among the Gentiles; but the destruction of Jerusalem, and the miraculous preservation of the Christians, was so visible a testimony to Christianity, and delivered the Christian church from such bitter and implacable enemies, that the gospel had a freer passage, and prevailed mightily in the world.

And the dispersion of the Jews into all countries, as before it spread the knowledge of the one true God, so now it made them unwilling witnesses to Christianity, as being the visible triumph of the crucified Jesus.

In a word, when all mankind were idolaters, God chose the posterity of Abraham, and multiplied them into a great nation, to preserve and propagate the knowledge and worship of the one supreme God, and to prepare men to receive the gospel, which would in time extirpate all pagan idolatries. When Christ was come, and the gospel preached to the world, God rejected that nation for their infidelity, and by that means gave a freer passage to the gospel among the Gentiles; and St. Paul intimates that the time will come, when the sincere faith and exemplary piety of the Christian church shall contribute as much to the conversion of the Jews as they formerly did to the conversion of the Gentiles;

for this seems to be the sum of the apostle's reasoning, with which I shall conclude this argument, Rom. xi. 30, &c.: "For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet now have obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy; for God had concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

II. Let us now consider the wisdom of providence in some more common and ordinary events, especially such as are made objections against providence. I have already upon other occasions taken notice of several things of this nature; but it will give us a more transporting sense of the Divine wisdom to see as much of it as we can in one view.

In general, whoever considers what it is to govern a world, and to take care of all the creatures that are in it, must confess it to be a work of infinite and incomprehensible wisdom.

The Epicureans for this reason rejected a providence, because they thought it too much trouble for their gods, full of care, solicitude, and distraction, to observe all that is done in the world; and to overrule and determine all events as wisdom, justice, and goodness should direct, and indeed nothing less than an infinite mind can do this, which sees all things at one view, judges infallibly at first sight, and orders all things with a powerful thought.

But my chief design at present is to show you the wisdom of providence in some particular cases, which either are not sufficiently observed, or not rightly understood.

Some of the great objections against providence are the troublesome and tempestuous state of this world; the uncertainty of all events; the fickleness and inconstancy of human affairs; the promiscuous dispensation of the good and evil things of this life, both to good and to bad men: and I have already vindicated, not only the justice and goodness, but the wisdom of God upon these accounts; by showing what wise ends God serves by them, and what a wise use we may make by such providences. And therefore the principal thing that I shall insist on, shall be some of those wise methods God uses in rewards and punishments: wherein

the great wisdom of government consists: And I shall briefly mention some few.

1. That God rewards and punishes men in their posterity. This is so plainly taught in Scripture that it will admit of no dispute; though some men venture to dispute the justice, at least of one part of it, that God should "visit the sins of the fathers upon the children;" which the Jews objected against God in that profane proverb, "the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," (Ezek. xviii. 2;) and by the answer God there makes, we may learn in what sense God threatens to punish the posterity of bad men, and to reward the posterity of good men, for their fathers' sakes; which does not extend to the other world, where every man shall be judged according to his own works, and "the soul that sinneth it shall die;" and as to this world, where we may allow more to the sovereignty of providence without impeaching the Divine justice; yet God assures us that a righteous son shall not be punished merely because he had a wicked father; nor a wicked son be rewarded merely because he had a righteous father; for thus much the words must signify, if they relate to this life, as they certainly do, as well as to a future state.

Now if neither a righteous son shall suffer for the wickedness of his father, nor a wicked son receive the rewards of his father's virtue, this can afford no pretence to impeach the justice of providence; but it gives occasion to inquire what sense God is said to visit the sins of the fathers upon their children, and to bless and prosper the posterity of good men for their sakes.

(1.) As for the first: if God does not punish a righteous son for the sins of his father, then "to visit the iniquities of the father upon the children," must be confined to such children only as inherit the vices, and imitate the wickedness of their parents: that is, God has threatened to punish the wicked children of wicked parents.

This, you will say, has nothing extraordinary in it; for God has threatened to punish all wicked men, whatever their parents are; and if they are punished only because they are wicked, how is this "to visit the iniquities of their fathers on them?" But the answer of this seems as obvious as the objection—that the wicked children of wicked parents shall be

more certainly and more severely punished than other bad men ordinarily are.

First. As for the certainty of their punishment. We know a great many bad men very often escape the Divine vengeance in this world, for all wicked men are not punished here as their wickedness deserves. The justice of the Divine providence, as I have already observed, does not require a sudden and hasty execution. Bad men may be prosperous many years, and be severely punished at last; or may be prosperous all their lives, and go down to their graves in peace, and only answer for their wickedness in the next world. But then God threatens that a more speedy vengeance shall overtake their posterity if they are wicked; that God will then remember that they are the wicked children of wicked parents, and not exercise the same patience and long-suffering to them. And this is in a proper sense to "visit the iniquities of their fathers on them"—for, though they are punished only for their own sins, yet the iniquities of their fathers are the reason why God punishes them in this world for their sins, and makes them the examples of his justice, while other men as wicked as themselves escape.

Secondly. As for the severity of their punishments. No man shall be punished more than his own sins deserve; but yet the wicked children of wicked parents may be, and very often are, punished more severely than any other wicked men.

God does not punish all bad men alike, for the punishments of this life are more properly acts of discipline than acts of judgment, and therefore are not proportioned to the nature of the crime, but to the circumstances and condition of the person, and to the wise ends of government; and if the wicked children of wicked parents are punished, though for their own sins, yet the more severely for their fathers' sake; this is to bear the iniquity of their fathers. To understand this, we must observe that the Scripture takes notice of a certain "measure of iniquity," which is filling up from one generation to another, till at last it makes a nation or family ripe for destruction; and although those persons on whom this final vengeance falls suffer no more than their own personal sins deserved, yet, because the sins of former generations, which they equal or outdo, make it time for God utterly to destroy them. The punishments due to the

sins of many ages and generations are all said to fall upon them. This account our Saviour gives of the destruction of Jerusalem, Matt. xxiii. 29—36: "Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, if we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.——Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." God may wait with patience upon a wicked nation, or a wicked family; but when they sin on from one generation to another, it all aggravates the account; and when God sees it time to punish, makes the punishment very severe or final.

(2.) The righteous posterity of good men are rewarded also for their fathers' sake; for "he showeth mercy to thousands of them that love him, and keep his commandments."

A wicked son may receive a great many temporal blessings from God, for the sake of a righteous father; for it is evident from Scripture that God shows great favour, and exercises great patience to bad men, for the sake of the good. But the promise is made only to the righteous seed of good men; for though it does not unbecome the Divine goodness to show favour to bad men, especially when it is for the sake of the righteous, which makes it the reward and encouragement of virtue; yet it does not seem fitting to make any general promise of favour to them, which would be an encouragement of vice.

The righteous seed then of good men shall be blessed; but so shall the righteous seed of wicked men be, and what peculiar privilege is this to the good? I answer, when God promises to bless the righteous posterity of good men, if it contain any thing peculiar which God has not so expressly promised to other good men, it must signify a more certain

and a more lasting prosperity in this world. All good men are not prosperous in this world, nor has God anywhere promised that they shall be so, no more than all wicked men are visibly punished here; but as God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon their children, by executing a more speedy vengeance on the wicked children of wicked parents; so the righteous children of righteous parents shall be more certainly prosperous than other good men; and the more uninterrupted successions there are of such righteous parents and righteous children, the deeper root they shall take, and be "like a tree planted by the rivers of waters, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doth shall prosper:" Ps. i. 3.

This may suffice for a short representation of this case; and as it is thus stated it is manifest that there is no injustice in it. Let us then consider what wise ends it serves, both with respect to parents and to children, and to the justification of providence.

(1.) As to parents. If they have any natural affection to their children, this is a very powerful argument to restrain them from vice, and to excite them to virtue. Most of the labour and toil which men undergo is for the sake of their children, to provide for them while they live, and to leave them in easy and happy circumstances when they die—to raise and perpetuate a family, and to secure them as far as it is possible from all adverse events. But how successful soever bad men may be in raising an estate, they build upon a sandy foundation, and leave a very perishing inheritance to their children; especially if they raise an estate by injustice and oppression, by defrauding God and the poor of their portions, which many times makes it moulder away in the hands even of a righteous heir. The more prosperous a wicked man is, the more likely is his posterity to be miserable, if he propagate his vices to them; for God will at one time or other reckon with families as well as men. And that will be a terrible account, when "the wickedness of his father shall be remembered before the Lord, and the sin of his mother shall not be blotted out:" Ps. cix. 14

And what an encouragement is this to good men, though they themselves should be unfortunate in the world, to know that their posterity shall reap the rewards of their virtue—

that if their children should be wicked, there is some reason to hope that they may be more gently used, and it may be receive many temporal blessings for their sakes. But if they be righteous, they shall then take root, and flourish in the earth; that the little which the righteous man hath righteously got, shall prove a better, a more lasting and increasing inheritance than the riches of many wicked; and that a liberal charity, which some men think is to defraud their children, shall prove like seed sown in the earth, which repays all with a plentiful harvest.

It is certain, were this firmly believed and well considered, it would lay the greatest obligation in the world, both on bad and good men, to take care of the religious and virtuous education of their children. The only way wicked men have to cut off the entail of misery from their families, and to secure their children from that vengeance which their own sins have deserved, is to train them up in piety and virtue; and the only way good men have to entitle their children to those temporal blessings wherewith God thinks fit to reward their virtues upon their posterity, which is the best inheritance they can leave them, is to make them good. The wicked children of wicked parents have their own and their father's sins to hasten and increase their punishments; and the righteous children of righteous parents have their own and their father's virtues to secure and to augment their rewards.

(2.) As for children. What greater obligation than this could be laid on them to avoid the evil examples and to imitate the virtues of their parents? The wickedness of their fathers makes it more dangerous for them to be wicked; for when wickedness is entailed, the punishment of wickedness is entailed too; and the longer judgment has been delayed the nearer it is, and the more severe it is like to be. The wicked son of a wicked father cannot promise himself to escape so well as his father did, because his father's sins, which he imitates, calls for a more speedy vengeance on him: either to put a stop to wickedness, or to root out a wicked family, and to pull down the leprous house. But what an encouragement is it to the children of righteous parents to imitate their virtues, that they may inherit all the blessings of their fathers? We think it a great advantage for children to inherit the fruit of their parent's industry, but to inherit

the rewards of their virtues is much greater; and this none but virtuous children can do. A prodigal son may inherit the estate of an industrious father, but cannot keep it; but a wicked son of a virtuous father forfeits his inheritance.

And though some good men meet with very little, or with no reward in this world, nay, suffer very severely for their virtue; this is no discouragement to their children, but gives them reasonable hopes to expect the more: for an exemplary virtue shall have its reward at one time or other, even in this world; and if the father had it not, the son, and the son's son through all the line of a virtuous succession, shall; when good men suffer or miss of the rewards of virtue in this world, they have the greater rewards in heaven, and their children on earth.

To reward good men, and to punish the wicked in their posterity, better answers the wise ends of providence in this world than the personal rewards and punishments of every particular good and bad man. I have already observed that there are very wise reasons why some bad men should be prosperous, and some good men afflicted in this world; and since this world is not the place of judgment, the Divine wisdom does not require that every good or bad man should be rewarded according to his works; but yet the wisdom and justice of providence does require that virtue should be rewarded, and vice punished, and that in such degrees, and in such a manner, as shall lay all reasonable restraints on the lusts and vices of men, and encourage their virtues. Now virtue is rewarded and vice punished, when it is rewarded or punished, if not in the persons, yet in the posterity of good or bad men; which leaves room for the trial of the faith and patience of good men, and for the exercise of God's goodness and patience to sinners, and for the ministries of bad men in the service of providence, and yet very effectually discourages wickedness, and encourages virtue.

2. Another instance of the wisdom of providence is, that God very often punishes sin with sin, and many times with sins of the same kind. Our daily observations may furnish us with examples enough of it which are visible and publicly known; and it may be, there are few sinners but know some which concern themselves, which the rest of the world does not know. Thus God punished the murder and adultery of

David, with the incest and rebellion of his son Absalom; and thus oppression is often punished with oppression, adultery with adultery, murder with murder, and wicked men are made plagues and scourges to each other.

And God thinks it no dishonour to the holiness of his providence to attribute all such retribution to himself; for God can serve the wise ends of his providence by the sins of men, without contributing to their sins; and it is certain there is not a fitter punishment in the world for sinners than to suffer the evils they do; that is, to be punished by the very sins which they commit.

Nothing more sensibly convinces them of a just providence than this; nothing can give them a more just abhorrence of their sins, than to feel the evils and mischiefs of them; nothing can more awaken and rouse their consciences than to suffer the evils which they have done. And one would reasonably think nothing should make them more afraid to do any evil which they are unwilling to suffer: so that nothing could better serve the wise ends of providence to convince men of a Divine *nemesis* and vengeance, to give them an abhorrence of their sins, and to make them afraid to commit them.

3. Another instance of the wisdom of providence, is in so often disappointing both our hopes and fears. When we are in the greatest expectation of some great good, either we are disappointed in what we expected, or if we have what we wished for, it does not answer our expectations; we find ourselves deceived in our enjoyments, and that it had been better for us if we had been without them. And when we are terrified with the apprehensions of some great evil which is just ready to fall on us, either the evil does not come as we feared, or it proves no evil, but a very great good to us. This is so often every man's case, that I need only appeal to your own observations for the proof of it.

Now what more effectual way could God take to convince us that we live in the dark, and know not what is good for ourselves; that we disturb our minds with vain hopes and with as vain fears; that it becomes us to leave all to God, and to depend securely on his providence, who overrules all things with a sovereign will: that this is the only way to be easy and safe; to choose nothing for ourselves, not to

prescribe to providence, but to do our duty, and then quietly expect what God will do.

Is it possible there should be a happier temper of mind than this? more honorable for God or more secure for ourselves? Does any thing more become creatures? Is there any more perfect act of religion, than to depend entirely on God, without hopes or fears, in a perfect resignation to his will, with a full assurance of his protection? And could providence more effectually convince us of this, than to let us see, by every day's experience, how apt we are to be mistaken, and to choose ill for ourselves; that our wishes and desires, were they answered, would very often undo us; and that we are saved and made happy by what we feared? and why then should we desire, why should we fear any longer? let us do our duty, and mind our own business, and leave God to take care of the world, and allot our portion in it.

4. We may observe also, that God very often defers the deliverance of good men, and the punishment of the wicked, to the utmost extremity.

When wicked tyrants and oppressors are at the height of their pride and glory, and good men are reduced to a hopeless state, beyond the visible relief of any human power. This was the case of Israel in Egypt, when God sent Moses to deliver them with a mighty hand, and an outstretched arm. This was several times their case in the days of the Judges, when they were oppressed by their enemies, and God raised up saviours and deliverers for them. Thus it was in the days of Hezekiah, when God in one night destroyed the mighty army of the Assyrians. Thus it was in Queen Esther's days, when that wicked Haman had conspired the destruction of the Jewish nation. And there want not examples of it in Christian story. Never was there a fiercer persecution of Christians, than when God advanced Constantine to the throne, and not only restored peace to the Christian church, but made Christianity the religion of the empire. And if the wisdom of providence consists in giving us wise instructions, I am sure this furnishes us with many.

When things are reduced to that extremity as to be past human relief, it makes it visible to all the world that it is God's doing. Where there is force against force, and

counsels against counsels, though providence determines the event, human power and counsels very often monopolize the glory, and leave God out; but when God does that which men are so far from being able to do, that they cannot think it possible to be done, this awakens a sense of an invisible power, and makes the Divine glory and providence known to the world.

When God exposes his own church and people to such a suffering state, and threatens them with final ruin, it is a severe summons to repentance, and warns them not to trust in vain words, crying, "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord"—for God will purge his own house, and no external relation or privileges shall secure us from vengeance, if we walk not "worthy of that holy vocation wherewith we are called."

But such deliverances as these give us great reason never to despair; they teach us that no case is desperate when God will save; and therefore the less expectation we at any time have of human succours, the more earnestly ought we to implore the Divine protection, and learn to live upon faith and trust in God.

When good men are reduced to such extremities, it makes them more fervent and importunate in their prayers, more serious in their repentance, more sensible how much they stand in need of God; and such surprising and unexpected deliverances inflame their devotions, make their praises and thanksgivings more hearty and sincere, which gives great glory to God, and betters their own minds.

5. The sudden revolutions of the world, and the various and unexpected changes of men's fortunes, which is thought one great calamity of human life, is intended by God to instruct us in some necessary and excellent parts of wisdom.

Some crafty politicians, like mariners, steer their course as the wind blows, and change as it changes. They have no other rule for their actions but to guess, as well as they can, where their advantage or safety lies; but providence very often disappoints them in this, by such hasty changes, and short turns, as make them giddy; and this teaches us to act by rule, not by a politic foresight of events. Our rule can never deceive us; what is just, and right, and true, is always safe; but our politics may, for things may not go as we expect.

The various changes of men's fortunes teach us to treat all men with great humanity; not to be insolent when we are prosperous, nor to despise our inferiors, for we know not what they nor we may be before we die. Civility and modesty of conversation is always safe, but pride and insolence may create us enemies, who may in time, how mean soever they are at present, be able to return our insolence.

The Divine providence so orders human affairs as to teach us most of the wisest rules of human life, both for our religious and civil conversation, and this I take to be a manifest proof of the wisdom of providence.

6. The wisdom of providence is often seen in the wise mixture and temperament of mercy and judgment; when he corrects, but not destroys; humbles but does not cast down; when he makes us sensible of his displeasure, and gives us just reason to fear, but without despair; when, as the Psalmist speaks, "he lifts up and casts down;" keeps us under the discipline of hopes and fears, and tries our faith, and patience, and submission, and both threatens and invites us to repentance, by the interchangeable scenes of prosperous and adverse events. Thus the Psalmist tells us it is with good men: "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way; though he fall, he shall not utterly be cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand:" Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24. Thus Ps. xciv. 14, 15: "For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance; but judgment shall return unto righteousness, and all the upright in heart shall follow it." And he proves this by his own experience: "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said my foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up:" verses 17, 18. An example of this ye have in Isaiah, xxvii.: "Hath he smitten them," that is Israel, "as he smote those that smote him?" He smote Israel, but not as he smote the enemies of Israel: "Or is he slain, according to the slaughter of them that are slain by him? In measure when it shooteth forth wilt thou debate with it? He stayeth his rough wind in the day of his east wind." This is to sing to God of mercy, and of judgment; to learn righteousness by the things which we suffer, but still to trust in his help.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING THE DUTIES WHICH WE OWE TO PROVIDENCE.

I HAVE now finished what I intended with relation to the nature and justification of providence, and all that remains is to explain and enforce those duties which we owe to providence.

Natural religion is founded on the belief of a God and providence; for if there be no God, there is no object of our worship; if there be no providence, there is no reason for our worship. But a God that made the world, and takes care of all the creatures that are in it, deserves the praises and adorations of all. A God who neither made the world nor governs it is nothing to us; we have no relation to him; he has nothing to do with us, nor we with him. But a God in whom "we live, and move, and have our being," is the supreme object of our love, and fear, and reverence, and hope, and trust, and of all those religious and devout affections which are due to our Maker and sovereign Lord.

This is so plain that it is enough to name it; but the nature and extent of those duties which we owe to providence deserves a more particular consideration.

As to instance in some of the chief—

I. To take notice of the hand of God in every thing that befalls us; to attribute all the evils we suffer, and all the good things we enjoy, to his sovereign will and appointment. This is the foundation of all the other duties which we owe to providence, and the general neglect of this makes us defective in all the rest.

Now if the Divine providence has the absolute government of all events, you must confess it your duty to take notice of providence, and to acknowledge God in every thing; for this is only applying the general doctrine of providence to particular events; without which particular application the general belief of a providence will and can have no effect upon us.

The Psalmist complains of those wicked men, "who regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands:" Ps. xxviii. 5. And a great many such there are,

who have a general notion and belief of a providence, but take no notice of what God does, or take no notice of God in what is done. Most men are too apt to attribute all events to the immediate and visible causes; and though at other times they will own a God and providence, yet, as to particular events, take as little notice of God as if he had nothing to do in it. Such a belief of providence as this, is of no use at all in religion; it neither gives glory to God, nor has any influence upon the government of our lives.

But if we will own providence to the true ends and purposes of religion, we must not content ourselves with a general belief of God's governing the world, but whatever our state and condition be, or whatever extraordinary good or evil happens to us, we must receive all as from the hand of God. If we are poor, we must own this to be God's will and appointment that we should be poor; if we be rich, we must consider that it is God's blessing which maketh us rich; if we lose our estates by injustice and oppression, we must acknowledge, as Job did, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;" and whatever evils and miseries befall us, we must say with good old Eli, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." Or with David, "I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because it is thy doings."

Without believing God's government of all events, we deny a particular providence; and unless at the very time when any good or evil befalls us, we see and acknowledge God's hand in it, we can have no present affecting sense of his providence. All such acts of providence are lost, as far as our taking no notice of them can lose them. God loses the glory of his goodness, mercy, patience, or justice, and we lose those divine comforts and supports, or those spiritual instructions and admonitions which a due sense and acknowledgment of providence would have furnished us with.

And therefore let us accustom ourselves in all events in the first place to take notice of God and his providence, which will teach us how to behave ourselves in all circumstances, and how to make the best and wisest use of whatever happens; and it was necessary to premise this, for it is vain to teach men their duty to providence till they have learned to attribute all particular events to the providence of God, and to live under a constant sense and regard of it.

II. When we have thus affected our minds with a just sense of the Divine providence in every thing that befalls us, we must in the next place take care to compose our souls to a quiet and humble submission to the sovereign will and pleasure of God in all things.

All men confess that it is our duty to submit to the will of God; and if all the events of providence are God's doings, and what God does is his will, as the Scripture assures us it is, and reason tells us it must be, unless God does any thing against his own will, then we must submit to the providential will of God in all events, as well as to the commanding will of God in obeying his laws.

The sovereign authority and dominion of God requires this of us; for we are his, and he may dispose of our condition and fortune in the world as he pleases. The absolute power of God makes it both prudent and necessary, "for who hath hardened himself against him and prospered?" that is, against his providential will; for that whole dispute is about providence, and the wisdom and goodness of God makes it both reasonable and our interest to submit to him; for all his providences, how severe soever they may appear, are ordered for the good of those who do submit to him. So that it is our duty to submit, because he is our sovereign Lord. Whether we will submit or no, we must suffer his will, because we cannot resist his power; and there is no danger in submitting to God, for he will consult our present and future happiness, and do better for us than we could choose for ourselves.

This is plain enough; but that which I principally intend is to consider the nature and various acts of that submission which we owe to providence, or to the providential will of God; and I shall distinctly inquire, what submission we owe to providence under all the evils, afflictions, and calamities of life, and in those several states, conditions, and relations of life, which the providence of God placeth us in.

1. What submission we owe to providence under all the sufferings and afflictions which we meet with in this world. I do not mention a happy and prosperous fortune, for it requires no great submission to be prosperous; this is what all men desire and choose; but to submit, is to make our wills, and desires, and fears, and aversions, and natural pas-

sions and affections stoop, and yield to the will of God, which there is no occasion for, but in a suffering and afflicted state. Now when we suffer such things as are very grievous to flesh and blood, submission to the will of God does not require that we should not feel our sufferings—that we should not be afflicted with them—that we should not complain of them ; for to submit to God is not to put off the sense and passions of human nature: it does not alter the nature of things, nor our opinions about them. Afflictions are afflictions still, and will be felt; and though we must bear them in submission to God, yet we must bear them as afflictions can be borne, and as human nature can bear them ; with pain, and grief, and reluctancy, with sighs, and groans and complaints, with vehement and importunate desires and prayers to God and man to help and deliver us.

We have frequent examples of this in Scripture. The Psalms of David, as they abound with all dutiful expressions of reverence and submission to the will of God, so they are very full of complaints, and of the most passionate sense of sufferings, represented so as to be felt, in such a strain of moving eloquence, as not art, but afflicted nature teaches. But we have one example above all others, and that is the example of our Saviour, Christ, who suffered with fear and reluctancy, and with earnest prayers to his father, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me."

The truth is, the greater our fears, and sorrows and aversions are, the greater our submission to God: it may be thought a great weakness of nature to be so much afraid of our sufferings, but it argues the greater strength of our faith, and is a more glorious victory over self, to make our fears and aversions submit to the Divine will; for the more what we suffer is against our will, the greater is our submission to the will of God. Submission to God does not consist in courage and fortitude of mind to bear sufferings which men may have without any sense of God; and which the profoundest reverence for God will not always teach us; but he submits, who receives the bitter cup and drinks it, though with a trembling heart and hand.

This ought to be observed, for the comfort of those who have a very devout sense of God, and reverence for his judgments, but betray a great weakness of mind and disor-

ders of passions under their sufferings; who are very impatient of pain, and have such soft and tender passions that every affliction galls them, and when they reflect upon these disorders, this creates new and greater troubles to them; for they conclude that all this is want of a due submission to the will of God. But religion was never intended to extinguish the sense and affections of nature, to reconcile us to pain, or to make all things indifferent to us; and while there is any thing that we love, it will be grievous to part with it; and while there is any thing that we fear, it will be grievous to suffer it. Religion will rectify our opinion of things, and cure our fondnesses, and set bounds to our passions; but when all these flattering, or frightful disguises are removed, which magnified the good or evil that is in things, yet good and evil they are, and will excite in us either troublesome or delightful passions; and this will exercise our submission to God, to part with what we love, and to suffer what we fear; and were not this the case there were no use of submission.

To explain this in a few words, let us consider how that man must suffer who suffers with submission to God; and that is the submission which we owe to providence. Now a man who suffers with submission, must not reproach and censure the Divine providence, but think and speak honourably of God, how hardly soever he deals with him; he may complain of what he suffers both to God and men, but he must not complain of God. This was Job's behaviour: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord; in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly:" Job i. 21, 22. And the prophet David was an example of the like submission: "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth because thou didst it:" Ps. ix. 39. He submitted silently and patiently as to God's hand, opened not his mouth against God, though he complains of the wickedness of men, and of the severity of his sufferings; "deliver me from all my transgressions, make me not the reproach of the foolish: remove thy stroke away from me; I am consumed by the blow of thine hand:" viii. 10.

To reproach and revile providence, to fret against God, or as Job's wife advised him, to curse God, to be weary of

his government, and impatient to think that we cannot resist, and cast off so uneasy a yoke; this is directly contrary to submission. Such men suffer God's will because they cannot help it; but they would rebel if they could; those who are so outrageous against what God does, and so impatiently angry with God for doing it, only want power to stay his hand and pull him from his throne.

Submission to God is the submission of our wills to the will of God. Now though no man can absolutely choose sufferings, for suffering is a natural evil, and therefore not the object of a free choice; yet men may choose suffering against the natural bias and inclination of their own wills in subjection to the will of God. Of this our Saviour is a great example, who expressed a great aversion against suffering, prayed earnestly: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done." Our own wills will draw back and recoil at suffering: "For no affliction is for the present joyous but grievous:" but yet a will that is subject to God, will deny itself, and choose that God's will should take place. And this is our submission to the will of God in suffering, that howsoever uneasy it be to us, we are so far from complaining against God, that we would not have it otherwise when God sees fit it should be so; that though we do not and cannot choose sufferings, yet we choose that the will of God should be done, though it be to suffer.

Another act of submission to God, is when we wait patiently on God till he think fit to deliver us; when notwithstanding all we suffer, our hope, and trust, and dependence is still on God. To submit to God is to submit in faith and hope, to submit as to the corrections and discipline of a father; for it is impossible for any man to submit without hope, as impossible as it is to be contented with final ruin. When we cast off our hope in God, there is an end of our submission; then we shall come to that desperate conclusion, "Behold this evil is of the Lord, why should I wait on the Lord any longer?" Kings ii. 6, 33. But never was there a greater expression of submission than that of Job: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him:—he also shall be my salvation, for a hypocrite shall not come before him:" Job xiii. 15, 16. This the Psalmist has fully expressed: Ps.

xxvii. 13, 14: "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." To hope in the mercy and goodness of God, even when he strikes, to wait patiently till he will be gracious, to make our complaints to him, and to expect our deliverance and salvation only from him; this is to submit to the will of God, to make his will our will, to attend all the motions of his providence as patiently and diligently as a servant does the commands of his lord, as it is elegantly represented in Ps. cxxiii. 1, 2: "Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens! Behold as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God until that he have mercy upon us."

This is that submission which we owe to providence, under all the evils and calamities of life how severe soever, and if we would make this submission easy and cheerful, we must possess our souls with a firm persuasion of the wisdom and goodness of God: we must not look upon him as a mere sovereign and arbitrary lord, for to submit to mere arbitrary will and power is, and will be very grievous; but we must represent God to our minds, under a more lovely and charming character, as the Universal Parent, who has a tender and compassionate regard for all his creatures: "Who does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, who corrects us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness;" and proportions the severity of his discipline, either to the ends of public government or to our spiritual wants. Such an idea of providence as this will reconcile us even to sufferings, when we know they are good for us, and intended for our good. When we know that it is a kind hand which strikes, we shall kiss the rod and submit to correction with as equal a mind, as we do to the prescription of a physician, how severe soever the methods of cure are. Were our minds thoroughly possessed with this belief, how easy it would make us under some of the severest trials. Nothing, indeed, can make pain easy, for that is a matter of sense; but a good persuasion of the providence of God will fortify our minds to bear it; a

that is much the same thing whether our pains be less, or our minds stronger. But as for other afflictions, which depend very much upon opinion, and afflict us more or less as we apprehend them, a firm belief of the wisdom and goodness of God, who inflicts them on us, will in a great measure cure the pain and trouble of them.

We have, it may be, lost some part of our estates, a dear friend, or near relation; a child, it may be an only child; but all these are uncertain comforts; and when the case is doubtful whether it be good for us or not, we ought in all reason to acquiesce in the Divine will, and conclude that is best for us which God does; because he is infinitely wiser than we are, and more concerned for our happiness, if we will make a wise use of his providence, than we ourselves are.

Nay, this will teach us an implicit faith in God beyond our own prospect of things; though we can no more guess the reasons of our sufferings than Job could, yet while we believe God to be wise and good, we are secure. A wise God can never mistake, and a good God will consult our happiness, and that is reason enough in the most difficult and perplexed cases to submit patiently to providence.

2. There is a submission also due to the will of God, with respect to the several states, conditions, and relations of life, which the Divine providence hath placed us in. We can no more choose our own state and condition of life, than we can choose when and where to be born, what our parents shall be, how they shall educate us and dispose of us in this world, what success we shall have, what friends or what enemies we shall meet with, what changes and revolutions we shall see, either in our private fortunes or in public affairs. Nothing of all this is at our own choice, and therefore whatever our circumstances are, any further than it is our own fault, they are not imputable to us.

Now since we cannot choose our own fortune, nor order events as we please, the only submission we can owe to God in such cases, is humbly to acquiesce in what God does, and faithfully to discharge the duties which belong to that state, and condition, and circumstances of life which the providence of God has placed us in.

This is to submit to the providential will of God, to submit to the disposals of providence; and to submit to God's

disposal is to act in that sphere and station which providence assigns us, and to comply with the laws of it. And thus the providence of God, though it be not the rule of our actions, yet may change our duty, and must do so, as it changes our condition; for every condition and relation having peculiar duties belonging to it, our duty must change as our condition does. The duties of princes and subjects, of magistrates and private men, of a low and mean, and of an exalted and plentiful fortune, of parents and children, of masters and servants, are of a very different nature; and as these relations change, our duty must change with them; and when we conform ourselves to our condition, we submit to providence, which gives us no new rules of life, but may impose new duties on us, by putting us into a new state.

This ought to be carefully considered, because there are dangerous extremes on both sides. Some think the visible appearances of providence are sufficient to alter our duty without changing our state and relations; that the successes of providence will justify such actions, as neither the laws of God nor men will justify; and that to serve providence when a fair opportunity is put into their hands, they may dispense with the most known and unquestionable duties. Others have such a just abhorrence of this, which overturns all human and Divine laws, that they run into the contrary extreme; and for fear of allowing that providence can change our duty, and alter the nature of good and evil, they will not allow that providence can so much as change our relations and state of life, and with such a change of our condition, change our duty. For no man can deny, but that if our condition and relations are changed, our duty must change too.

To give a plain example of this. When Saul pursued David, and God delivered Saul into David's hands while he was asleep in the cave, "the men of David said unto him, behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, behold I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good to thee." Here is an argument from providence to justify David's killing Saul, whom God had so wonderfully delivered into his hands. But David did not think that providence would justify him against a Divine law; providence gave him an opportunity to kill Saul, but the Divine law forbade him to take it; for

Saul was his king still, and he was his subject. And therefore "he said unto his men, the Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed," 1 Sam. xxiv. 4, 6. The same answer David gave to Abishai, when he found Saul the second time sleeping in the trench, "and Abishai said to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day; now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear, even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time. And David said to Abishai, destroy him not; for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" 1 Sam. xxvi. 8, 9. Providence had not unkinged Saul, nor made David king; that is, it had not altered the relation, and therefore could not absolve him from the duties of his relation, from those duties which a subject owes to his prince, and therefore could not justify the killing him.

This shows that the Divine providence cannot alter the rules of action without altering our condition, and relations, and circumstances of life; and where it does so it must of necessity change our duty; for different relations and conditions require different duties. When a man of a servant becomes a master, or of a subject a prince, his duties and obligations must change with his relations, for such relative duties are annexed to relations, and belong to particular persons, only as invested with such relations; and as the person changes his relations, so the duties he owes, and the duties which are owing to him, must change likewise.

It is a vain pretence in this case to set up the laws of God against our submission to providence; for we do not oppose the providence of God against his laws. The laws of God prescribe us the rules of our duty in all conditions and circumstances of life; the providence of God chooses our condition for us, and that directs us what laws we are to observe, what duties we owe, and to whom. So that there is and can be no dispute about the rules of duty; the duties of all conditions and relations are fixed and certain; the only dispute that can be is this, whether, when our conditions and relations are changed, they are changed by God? and whether we must submit to the providence of God in such a change, by what means soever such a change is brought

about? If all the private and public changes of men's state and condition are directed and governed by God, and are his will and doings, as I have already proved; if we must submit to providence, we must submit to that state and condition which providence places us in; for there is no other way of submitting to providence.

And since we cannot choose our own fortune, much less govern kingdoms and empires, since God keeps all these events in his own hands, it would be very hard, if we must not submit to the condition which Providence chooses for us; that when God allots us our condition, it should be unlawful for us to do what our condition requires to be done. For if our present condition and circumstances of life do not determine our duty, it is impossible ever to know what our duty is.

But there are some material questions concerning our submission to providence, with respect to our several states and conditions of life, which deserve to be considered.

(1.) As, first, whether it be consistent with our submission to providence, to endeavour to better our fortune, and to change our state of life. Now this there can be no doubt of in general, though I fear many men are to blame in it. Submission to providence does not forbid a poor man to enrich himself, when he can do it by honest and prudent arts; for though God allots every man his portion in the world, yet he has reserved to himself a liberty of changing men's fortunes as they deserve, and as he sees fit. That it often is so, experience tells us. We see men rise from low and mean beginnings to great riches, and honour, and power: and since God has not forbid any man to advance his fortune by honest means, submission to providence does not stake a man down to the low and mean beginnings of life. This is the present reward and encouragement of diligence, prudence, and virtue; that "the diligent hand maketh rich; that a man who is diligent in his business shall stand before princes, and shall not stand before mean men. That the merchandise of wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold: that length of days is in her right hand, and in her left riches and honours:" Prov. iii. 14, 16. Providence gives us many examples of this nature to encourage all men's industry and virtue, which, whether it advances

their fortunes or no, will make their lives easy and happy, and better their minds, and make them useful to the world, and a credit to a low fortune; which may be better for them than to change their station. Nay, sometimes we see men of a noble and sprightly genius come into the world in such mean circumstances, that they can hardly peep above the horizon; but by degrees they ascend, and grow brighter, and shine with a meridian lustre, as if their obscure beginnings were intended on purpose to inspirit the lower end of the world, and to show what industry and virtue can do.

But though submission to providence does not hinder us from using all honest endeavours to better our fortune, yet it makes us easy and contented in low fortune, patient of disappointments, and not envious at the better success and greater prosperity of others, especially of those who are our equals. All which signifies no more than quietly and submissively to suffer God to dispose of our own and other men's fortunes as he pleases. We may like some other condition better than our own, but submission to providence will make us easy and contented with what we have because it is God's will, and what he orders for us, and if we believe well of God, we must believe that it is good for us. We may endeavour to increase our estate and get a little higher in the world; but if our endeavours want success, we must take it patiently, and wait God's time, and be contented to tarry where we are, if he does not think fit to advance us; and not repine if he advance others before and above us; for it is God's will to advance them, and it is not his will to advance us, and he has wise reasons for both, and we ought to acquiesce in his will with an implicit faith.

We may endeavour to better our fortune, but we must not force ourselves upwards, must not be restless in our desires: must use no base or wicked arts to make ourselves great. This is not to submit to God, but to carve out our own fortune, without any reverence to the laws and to the providence of God. Nothing will content such men but to be rich and great, and they will boggle at nothing that will make them so: God sometimes suffers such men to prosper, but they do not prosper in submission to providence; but if I may so speak, they commit a rape upon providence; and providence deals with them accordingly, and makes them

the sport of fortune. When they have taken a great leap it tosses them up, and keeps them hovering a while in the air, and then slings them down into irrecoverable and unpitied ruin. Though no men can advance them whether God will or no, because all events are in God's hands; yet when men advance themselves by sin, the means of their advancement is their own, not the will of God; but submission to providence requires us quietly and contentedly to keep our station till God sees fit to advance us, at his own time, and in his own way.

(2.) What submission is due to God in the changes of our fortune and condition, and that whether it be from low to high, or from high to low.

As for the *first*, there are few men who find any difficulty in submitting to providence, when it advances them to a higher station; but some few such there are, who love their ease and retirement, and the conversation of their friends, and the security of a private life, before noisy greatness and the endless fatigues of public ministries; who had rather enjoy themselves, and be masters of their own time, and thoughts, and actions, than to be admired and flattered slaves, to be envied by some, to be courted by others, to be servants to all; to be exposed to censorious tongues, to the frowns of princes, to the emulations of their equals, and to all the changes and vicissitudes of fortune. It is not often that men of this temper are in any great danger of such troublesome honours; there are enough that snatch them before they are offered, to secure those who have no mind to have them; but sometimes this does happen, and then it is matter of duty and conscience for men to sacrifice their own ease and private satisfactions to the service of God and of their country. And it would be as great a fault obstinately to decline such services as the providence of God calls them to, as it is vanity and ambition to affect them; for God has a right to the services of all his creatures, and may employ them in what station he pleases. Then we may certainly conclude that providence chooses our station for us, when it is what we did not, and would not choose for ourselves.

Secondly. But the greater and more common difficulty is in submitting to the other change, from a high to a low fortune. There are many who suffer such a change as this, though

most of them may thank their own lusts and vices for it; but there are very few who submit to it. I do not only mean that they do not bear such a change of fortune with that patience and submission which is due to the Divine will, when this change is manifestly owing to providence, and not to their own fault; but that they will not submit to their condition, that they will not submit to be poor, when the providence of God has made them so. Some men, if they meet with misfortunes, will be sure to make their creditors pay for it, and be their own carvers too, and raise an estate out of forced and knavish compositions. Others, though they are very poor, will not submit to the state of poverty, will not bring their minds to their condition; they cannot stoop to the mean and frugal and industrious life of poverty. They have always lived well and easily, and they expect to live still as they have lived, and to be maintained according to their quality, and the figure they have formerly made in the world. They cannot work, but to beg they are not ashamed, though a truly great mind would prefer the meanest employment before it; for that is no dishonour to any man to live by his own industry, when the providence of God has brought him low. All that I have now to say is only this, that when men are reduced to poverty, submission to providence requires that they should submit to their condition, imitate the humility, and modesty, frugality, and industry of poor men, and not expect to live still as rich men do; for charity was never intended for the rich, nor to excuse the industry of the poor.

There is indeed great regard to be had to the honour of men's birth and character. Those who have any humanity must needs be very tenderly and compassionately affected to see men of great honour reduced to want, or forced to mean and servile employments to supply their wants; and we owe so much to the modesty of human nature, and to a sense of honour, to be as ready to defend some men from meanness as others from want; but yet submission to providence requires all men to comply with their condition, as far as their rank and character, and the rules of decency will permit: That a man has been once rich is no reason why he should not work, or find out some honest, though mean way of living when he grows poor. This is certain, those who do not submit to the condition which providence has

put them into, and behave themselves as that condition requires, do not submit to providence; and therefore if providence makes us poor, we must consider, not how we lived when we were rich, but how it becomes a poor man to live.

Thirdly. There is another very material question, how far we must submit to providence; but the answer is very plain. We must submit as far as the condition providence puts us into requires our submission. Providence creates no new duty, but by putting us into new circumstances; and what the circumstances we are in make our duty, that is our submission to providence, and we owe no other submission.

As for instance: If a thief breaks open my house, or robs me upon the road, submission to providence does not hinder me from pursuing and taking him, and recovering my own of him, and bringing him to punishment, if I can; for my being robbed lays no obligation upon me patiently to lose what is unjustly taken away, if I have any honest way left of recovering it; nor of suffering such a criminal to escape, if I can bring him to punishment. And thus it is in all the injuries we receive from men; though we must own the Divine providence in whatever we suffer, yet submission to providence requires no more of us than what the laws of God and men require in such circumstances, and therefore allows us to right ourselves, as far as the laws of God and the laws of men, if they be just and equal, will allow us. But if the providence of God should put us into the hands of our enemies, and make it necessary to contract with them for our lives and liberties, we must humbly submit to providence, which brought us into this necessity, and religiously observe our contracts, how disadvantageous soever they are; because providence has now altered our condition, and brought us under new obligations.

This is the usual way whereby God brings about the great changes and revolutions of the world, by such power as forces a compliance, and translates kingdoms and empires; and though nothing is more grievous than unjust force, yet nature teaches men to submit, when they cannot resist, and power will absolve us from all former obligations, unless in such cases as we are expressly commanded by God not to submit to power, though we sacrifice our lives for it; and I know no such case, but the true worship of God, and the

profession of our faith in Christ. We may defend ourselves against private injuries, as far as law and justice will defend us; we may resist unjust and usurping powers, as long as we can resist; but the providence of God, which governs the world, makes it lawful to submit when we cannot resist; and when by such submissions new kingdoms are erected, and we are become the subjects of new powers, then providence has changed our relations, and made it our duty to submit.

Fourthly. There is another inquiry also of great moment, how our submission to providence, under all our suffering and changes of fortune, requires us to behave ourselves towards men, who are the causes and instruments of such misfortunes. For if it be the will of God that we should suffer such things, why should we be angry with the men who do them? why should we punish them? why should we revenge ourselves of them? when they only execute the Divine counsels, and do what God saw fit that we should suffer. Does not Joseph thus excuse his brethren for selling him into Egypt, that it was God who sent him thither: and does not David for this reason forbear his revenge on Shimei, "Let him curse, for God hath said unto him, Curse David!"

But the answer to this is short and plain, that God's overruling men's wickedness to serve wise and good ends, does not excuse their wickedness, nor excuse them from the just punishment of their wickedness; the sin is their own, though it be wisely ordered by God for our trial or correction; but the wise government of God makes no change in the nature of men's actions, nor in their deserts: God himself will punish their wickedness, though he serves wise ends by it, and has commanded men to do so; for no man sins by the will of God, though no man suffers any thing but by God's will.

But yet submission to providence will greatly mitigate our resentments, and calm our passions, and keep them within the bounds of reason and religion. When we consider, that whatever we suffer is appointed for us by God; that how wicked soever men are, we can suffer nothing by their wickedness, but what God for wise reasons sees fit we should suffer; this will satisfy us that we are more concerned with God than with men; that though men be the rod wherewith we are scourged, it is God that strikes; and a reverence for

the Divine judgments will make us take less notice of the instruments of our sufferings.

In short, submission to providence leaves us nothing to be angry with men for, but their own wickedness; that we suffer, though we suffer by their wickedness, yet it is not so much their doings as God's, who orders these sufferings for us, and without whose order and appointment no man can hurt us; and therefore we must not be angry with men for our sufferings, but reverence God. Whatever their personal hatred, or malice, or revenge be, how much soever they intend or desire to do us hurt, we may securely despise them, as out of their reach, for we are in the hands of God: and if our sufferings are not owing to men, any otherwise than as instruments in God's hands, why should we be angry with men for what we suffer? Why should we revenge our sufferings on them, when we suffer by the will of God? We may be angry at their wickedness, and at their ill-will to us, but humbly submit to our suffering, as the will of God.

Now I need not say, how this will calm and temper our passions, because it leaves so little of self in our anger and resentments; let men be as angry with wickedness as they please, and punish it as it deserves, this is a virtuous anger, and never transports men to excess; it is self-love which inflames our anger and sharpens our revenge; not that such wickedness is committed, but that we are the sufferers by it; for men are never so angry in another man's cause as they are in their own, though the wickedness, the affront, the injury is the same; but personal injuries and affronts are most provoking; that is, we love ourselves more than we hate wickedness, when our anger is excessive.

But now if men have nothing to do with us, nor we with them, as to the case of suffering; if all this be ordered and appointed by God, here is little room for personal resentments; for that we suffer by their wickedness, is God's doings, and therefore we have nothing to be angry with them for, but that they are wicked; and then though our own sufferings will give us a greater sense and abhorrence of their wickedness, and make us more personally concerned to punish it; yet our passions will be more gentle and easy, the more we attribute our sufferings to God, and the less to men.

III. Another duty we owe to providence, is an entire trust

and dependence on God. The state of a creature is all dependence; and faith, and hope, and trust, are the virtues of a dependent state, and can in reason have no other object but that Being on whom we depend, the great Creator and Governor of the world, "in whom we live, move, and have our being." All other dependencies are vain, because none else can help us; but God has all events in his hands, he can help us if he pleases; and he will help us if we trust in him.

The Scripture abounds with exhortations to trust in God; with promises to those who do trust in him; with examples of God's care and protection of those good men who make him their only hope and trust; but yet the duty itself needs some explication, and therefore I shall consider the nature of this hope and trust, and what are the various acts of it, or wherein the exercise of it consists.

(1.) The nature of this faith, and hope, and trust in the Divine providence. What it is to hope, and trust, and depend on God, or men, we all know and feel; but the question is, what it is we must trust God for, and how far we must depend on him? For must we believe, that God will do every thing for us which we trust in him to do? If, suppose we have a child or a friend dangerously sick, must we firmly believe that God will spare their lives, and restore their health, if we trust in him to do it? Must a merchant confidently expect a safe and advantageous voyage, if he trust in God for it? Has God anywhere promised to give us whatever we trust in him for? Or does the nature and reason of providence infer any such thing? And yet what does trust in God signify, if we must not depend on him for those good things which we want, and desire, and trust him for? What do all the promises made to hope and trust in God signify, if they give us no security that we shall obtain our desires of God? Nay, indeed, how can any man hope and trust in God, when he has no assurance that he shall obtain what he hopes for? I doubt not but such thoughts as these make most men so distrustful of providence, that though they talk of trusting in God, they trust in him without hope, or any comfortable expectations, unless they have some more visible assurances to rely on. This makes most men's hopes ebb and flow, as their external circumstances change; if they are prosperous, and have

great numbers of friends, and have their enemies at their feet, then they are full of hope, and can trust securely in God, when they have the means of helping themselves in their own hands, and see nobody that can hurt them; but if their condition be perplexed and calamitous, and they see no prospect of human relief, their spirits sink, and as much as they talk of providence, and trusting in God, they find no support in it.

To understand this aright, wherein the glory of God, and our own peace and security is so nearly concerned, we must consider, that our faith, and hope, and trust in God, must either rely on the word and promise of God, or on the general belief and assurance of his care of us, and of the goodness and justice of his providence; as to trust in men, is either to trust their promise or their friendship.

(1.) As for the first, we may and ought securely to rely on the promises of God, as far as they reach, for "he who hath promised is able also to perform." But then we must have a care of expounding temporal promises to a larger sense than God intended, or than providence ordinarily makes good, which calls the truth of God, or his providence, into question, and discourages our faith and trust in God, when we see events not to answer God's promises nor our expectations.

To state this matter plainly, we must proceed by degrees, and distinguish between the promises made to states and kingdoms, and to private and single men, or rather to men in their private and single capacities.

Most of the temporal promises under the law of Moses concerned the public state of the Jewish church and nation; that if they walked in the laws and statutes of God, he would bless them with great plenty and peace, or give them victory over their enemies: "That he would have respect unto them, and make them fruitful, and multiply them, and establish his covenant with them:" Lev. xxvi.—which are public and national blessings; and though there is a great difference between the Jewish and Christian church, with respect to temporal promises, yet there does not seem to be any great difference between a Christian nation and the Jewish state. When a nation has embraced Christianity, and the church is incorporated into the state, and true religion

and virtue are encouraged, and vice suppressed, such a religious nation has a title to all the national blessings which God promised to the Jewish nation, if they observed his laws; for Solomon's observation is universally true, "That righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people:" and excepting what was typical in the Jewish state, there is much the same reason for God to protect and bless a religious Christian nation: viz. for the public encouragement of religion, and for the reward of a national piety and virtue; and therefore as the Christian church inherits all those spiritual blessings which were typified in the Jewish church; so a Christian nation succeeds to all those temporal promises which were made to the Jewish state, or else all these promises of the law would be of no use to us now.

So that these national promises we may securely rely on as to their utmost extent and signification; and I am satisfied there cannot be one example given, wherein these promises have failed: God has oftentimes suffered a wicked nation to be prosperous to scourge their wicked neighbours, but he never suffers a truly righteous and religious nation to be oppressed.

Now the largest and most comprehensive promises in Scripture are of this nature, such as concern the public state of kingdoms and nations: but even in the most flourishing state of the Jewish church, the case of particular men was very different; some bad men were prosperous, and good men afflicted; and therefore those promises which concern good men in their private and single capacities, must be more cautiously expounded to a more restrained and limited sense, accommodated to the different states and conditions of good men in this world, and to their different attainments in virtue. As for example:

When Solomon tells us of wisdom, "Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left riches and honour:" Prov. iii. 16—will any man expound this to signify, that all wise men, who are truly religious and prudent, shall live to old age, and attain to riches and honours? Did God then intend that there should be no different ranks and degrees of men in the world? that there should be no poor men as well as rich? or did he intend that no poor men should be wise? Wisdom indeed will advance a prince to great riches

and honour, as Solomon tells us his father David instructed him: "He taught me also, and said unto me, let thine heart retain my words, keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom, get understanding: forget her not: neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee; love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore, get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her; she shall give to thine head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee:" Prov. iv. 4, 9. This was the best advice that could be given to a young prince to make him rich and great; for religious wisdom will certainly advance him beyond all the politics of Machiavel; and if Solomon, in imitation of his father David, directs his instructions to his children, and particularly to that son who was to inherit his throne, as he himself seems to intimate, (verses 1—3,) we must not conclude, that because he tells his son that wisdom will make him a glorious prince, that therefore wisdom will advance all men to riches and honour: wisdom will give a lustre even to poverty itself, and sometimes advances the poor to riches and honours, and increases the riches and honours of the rich and honourable; but we must not always expect this, much less pretend a promise for it; for there always were, and always will be, poor wise men.

Thus, when the wise man tells us, that "the hand of the diligent maketh rich," Prov. x. 4; and, "seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men:" Prov. xxii. 29; no man can think that the meaning is, that every diligent man shall be rich; for there are such mean employments as can never raise an estate by the greatest industry; much less can we think, that diligence in such mean employments shall make men known to princes; or that all diligent men, whatever their employment or profession be, shall serve kings. This is impossible in the nature of the thing, and therefore cannot be the meaning of these promises. And yet such kind of promises as these signify a great deal for the encouragement of wisdom, and industry, and virtue; not that every wise, and prudent, and diligent man shall be rich and

honourable, but that every man shall find the rewards of religion and virtue proportioned to his capacities and state of life: and that this is God's way of promoting men when he advances them in favour, in good will to them; and therefore this is the only way wherein we must expect the blessing and protection of God.

But then there are some promises which are equally made to all good men, and they are a sure foundation of our hope and trust if we be truly good men in all conditions. As that God "will never leave them, nor forsake them:" Heb. xiii. 5. That he will always take care of them as a father takes care of his children. That though he may not think fit to advance them in the world, yet he will provide food and raiment for them, as our Saviour proves by many arguments, Matt. vi. 25, 34. "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your bodies, what ye shall put on: is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" and will not that God who has given us our lives and our bodies, give us what is absolutely necessary for their support? "Behold the fowls of the air! they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them: are ye not much better than they? Therefore, take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek,) for your heavenly Father knoweth ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

This is an absolute promise, and gives absolute security to good men, that if they take care to serve God, God will take care to feed and clothe them, either by blessing their ordinary prudence and industry, or when that fails, by extraordinary providences, by providing for them without their care or labour, as he feeds the fowls of the air, who neither sow nor reap. And to name but one promise more, which is our security in all conditions: St. Paul assures us, "that all things work together for good to them that love God:" (Rom. viii. 28:) which is such a general security, as is a foundation for an universal hope in God; that though we cannot know, in every particular case, what God will do for

us, yet we certainly know that he will order all things for our good.

Thus far we have the promises of God to trust to, that God will always take care of us, and, in particular, that he will provide food and raiment for us, which is all that he has absolutely promised to good men, and is all that our Saviour allows us absolutely to pray for; "Give us this day our daily bread." And this, good men, whose faith does not fail, but, against all discouragements, trust securely in God's provision, may ordinarily expect from God, even in an afflicted and persecuted state, where famine itself is not the persecution; for I dare not extend this so far as to say, that no good man shall ever die of want; for some extraordinary cases are always excepted out of the most general and absolute promises relating to this life, and reserved to the government of the Divine wisdom. But good men may have food and raiment, and yet be exposed to many inconveniences and sufferings; and therefore, for our farther security, we are assured, "that all things shall work together for good to them that love God."

(2.) And this brings me to consider, what it is to trust in God in particular cases, when we have no particular promises what God will do for us in such cases, but only a general assurance of God's care of us, and of the wisdom, justice, and goodness of his providence. We must particularly trust in God for our daily provisions, for our preservation from any present evils which threaten us,—for the success of our undertakings in all the particular actions and concernments of our lives. But what can such a particular trust mean, or what foundation is there for it, when we have no particular promises that God will protect or succeed us in such particular cases? and notwithstanding God's care of us, and the justice and goodness of his providence, he may not answer our expectations in such cases, but may order things quite otherwise than we desire.

Now this, I confess, were an unanswerable difficulty, did a particular trust in God signify a firm belief and persuasion that God will do that particular thing which I rely and depend on him for; for no man can have any reason to believe this, or in this sense to trust in God without an express promise or some private revelation. Now it is certain, there

are no such particular promises which we can with any reason apply to ourselves, contained in Scripture; and private enthusiasms are a dangerous pretence—the dreams of self-love, and the visions of a heated imagination.

I grant, that under the law there were such particular promises and particular revelations made to good men, which were a sure foundation for a particular faith and trust in God, as to some particular events, especially as to the events of war, which were commonly undertaken by God's express command, managed by his direction, with a certain promise of success—as is evident in the wars of Moses, and Joshua, and the Judges; and in after ages God did the same thing, either by his oracle of Urim and Thummim, or by his prophets.

But there is no such thing among us now; and therefore such a faith and trust in God we cannot have, nor does God expect it from us. We have nothing to depend on as to the certainty of events, but must trust to that assurance we have of God's care of us, and of the wisdom and goodness of his providence, and therefore must consider what trust and dependence that is which we owe to providence.

Now to trust providence is not to trust in God, that he will do that particular thing for us which we desire; but to trust ourselves and all our concernments with God, to do for us, in every particular case which we recommend to his care, what he sees best and fittest for us in such cases.

The difference between these two is very plain; and I think every one will confess, that such a general trust and affiance in God is a much more excellent virtue, and does much more honour to the Divine nature, than merely to trust his promise, which secures us of the event. To rely on God for the performance of his promise, does honour to his truth and faithfulness; but to trust God to choose our condition for us—to do for us either what we desire or what he likes better, argues such an entire dependence on God, and an absolute resignation to his will, with a perfect assurance of his wisdom and goodness, that it is impossible a creature can express a greater veneration for the Divine perfections. I am sure we do not think, that any man does us so much honour by taking our word for what we expressly promise to do for him, as that man does who commits all

his concernments with a secure confidence to our disposal, without knowing what we intend to do.

But for a more particular explication of this, let us consider what this trust in God signifies, and what security it gives us.

(1.) What this trust in God signifies; since it does not signify an assurance that God will do what we desire, what is the meaning of it? Now this signifies,

(1.) That all the good we hope for or expect, we expect from God alone; that we have no other reliances and dependencies but only on God, though we justly value the kindness of our friends, and the patronage and protection of princes and powerful favourites, and thank God when he raises up such friends and patrons to us, yet our entire trust and hope are in God; that since we know that all events are in God's hands, we are sure none can help us but by God's appointment, and we desire to be at the disposal of none but God; and therefore in Scripture, our trust in God is always opposed to our trust in men, in princes, in human counsels, policy or strength. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man; it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes:" Ps. cxviii. 8, 9. "Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed—he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God: they are brought down and fallen, but we are risen and stand upright:" Ps. xx. 6—8. All wise men are greatly satisfied and pleased to see the probable means and instruments of their safety and defence, because God ordinarily works by means; but good men know that they are but instruments in God's hands, and no wise man puts his trust in the instruments, be they ever so good, but in the workman. Thus much our trust in God must necessarily signify, that we have no reliance but only on God, who is the supreme Disposer of all things; that we depend as entirely on him, as if there were no second and intermediate causes, which are to be employed and used, but not to be the final objects of our trust.

2. Our trust in God signifies our absolute dependence on the wisdom, power, and goodness of God to take care

of us; it is committing ourselves to God, putting ourselves absolutely into his hands, with a full persuasion that he will do what we desire, or do what shall be better for us; that he will answer our requests, or deny them with greater wisdom and goodness than he could grant them.

All men must grant that this is a perfect trust in God, and such a trust and dependence as we owe to providence; for if God govern the world, and take care of all his creatures with infinite wisdom and goodness, does it not become all reasonable creatures to give up themselves securely to the government of providence? If we believe that infinite wisdom and goodness takes care of us, what need we know any more? Would we desire any thing else, or can we wish for any thing better than what infinite wisdom and goodness can do for us? or would we have any thing which infinite wisdom and goodness does not think fit to give us?

This indeed does not give us that security which some men desire, that we shall never suffer those particular evils which we fear, and which we see coming upon us; or that we shall obtain some other blessings which we are passionately fond of; but it gives us a much better security than this, that we shall have always what is good for us; which is more than we can promise ourselves, should God always grant our own desires.

This gives us a most profound rest and peace of mind, delivers us from all careful and solicitous thoughts for times to come, which are many times more terrible than the evils we fear; it teaches us to do our duty with the best prudence and industry we can; but to leave all events to God's disposal; to make known our requests to God, and "to cast all our care upon him, for he careth for us." It will not make us wholly unconcerned and indifferent whatever happens, because the natures of things are not equal or alike indifferent. Riches and poverty, health or sickness, honour or disgrace, war or peace, plenty or famine, cannot be alike indifferent to any man who has his senses about him; but it will make us quiet and patient under all events, and help us to bear the most adverse fortune with such an unbroken greatness of mind as is natural to a firm and steadfast hope and trust in God. This is properly to trust providence, not to trust that God will do every thing for us which we desire,

which is to command and govern, or at least to direct providence, not to trust it; but to live securely under the care and protection of God, without disturbing ourselves with unknown and future events, in a confident assurance that we are safe and happy in God's hands.

2. Though our trust in God does not signify an absolute security what God will do for us, yet it is the most certain way to obtain whatever we wisely and reasonably desire of God. When we trust in God he reserves to himself a liberty to judge whether it be good for us; but if what we desire be good for us, our trust and dependence on God will engage providence on our side.

Trust in God refers our cause to him to judge for us, and to do what he sees fit; and we have God's word and promise for it, that if we do trust in him he will take care of us, that we shall want nothing that is good, and shall be delivered from all evil; Ps. xxxi. 21, 22: "O how plentiful is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, and that thou hast prepared for them that put their trust in thee before the sons of men; thou shalt hide them privily by thy own presence, from the provoking of all men; thou shalt keep them secretly in thy tabernacle from the strife of tongues." Thus, Ps. xxxvii. 40, 41: "The salvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord, who is also their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall stand by them and save them, he shall deliver them from the ungodly, and shall save them because they put their trust in him." The whole ninety-first Psalm is so plain and full a proof of this that I need name no more. To trust in God is called "dwelling in the secret place of the Most High," or under the "defence" and protection of "the Most High." That is, such a man puts himself under God's protection, and he that does so, "shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty;" that is, "he shall defend thee under his wings, and thou shalt be safe under his feathers; his faithfulness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler." And the Psalmist particularly reckons up most of the evils which are incident to human life, and promises security against them all; "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."

This Psalm indeed is a prophecy of our Saviour, and in the height and latitude of the expressions is applicable only to him, but yet it gives a general security to all who trust in God, of protection from all evil. This no man can promise himself, who does not trust in God; for how is providence concerned for them who expect nothing from it? Nay, this is a reason why such men should be disappointed and fall into misery, to convince them that God does govern the world, and that no human strength or policy can save them. But trust in God makes us the subjects and the care of providence; for if God does govern the world, none so much deserve his protection as those who commit themselves to his care. A good man will not deceive or forsake those who depend on him, much less will a good God.

IV. Another duty we owe to providence, is prayer: to ask of God all those blessings and mercies which we need. The universal practice of all nations who owned a God, and that natural impulse all men find to seek to God in their distress, show what the sense of nature is; but yet some of the ancient philosophers were much puzzled how to reconcile prayer with their notions of necessity and fate; and indeed, were providence nothing else but a necessary chain of causes or fixed and immutable decrees, there would be no great encouragement to pray to God, who, upon this supposition, cannot help us, no more than he can alter destiny and fate. But if God governs the world with as great liberty and freedom as a wise and good man governs his family, or a prince governs his kingdom, there is as much reason to pray to God as to offer up our petitions to our parents or to our prince; for if we must receive all from God, what imaginable reason is there that we should not ask every thing of him.

But it will be necessary to discourse this matter more particularly; for we live in an age wherein men are very apt to reason themselves out of all religion, and to form such notions of God and his providence as makes it needless, nay, absurd to worship him.

The apostle tells us, that "he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," Heb. xi. 6. No man can be a devout worshipper of God, who does not believe that there is a God

to worship, and that this God does take care of mankind, and that he has a peculiar favour for those who worship him; that he is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek him:" for if God neither take any care of us, or take no more care of those who worship him, than of those who do not, there is no just reason can be given why any man should worship him. But the apostle in this supposes, that to believe there is a God, and that he governs the world, and that we shall be the better for worshipping him, is a reasonable foundation for religious worship; and therefore such notions of God and his providence as allow no peculiar rewards and benefits to worshippers, are certainly false, how philosophical soever they may appear, and impious too, because they shut all religious worship out of the world.

And yet some men can by no means understand for what reason they should pray to God: they comply with the superstitious customs of the country to avoid scandal and public censure, but think they might as well let it alone, as for any advantage they hope for by their prayers: and I am very much of their mind that they had as good not be present at prayers as not to pray; for no man can pray to any advantage who despises prayer. It will therefore be highly necessary plainly to state this matter, and to show you,

That the belief of a Divine providence lays the strongest obligation on us to pray to God.

The Scripture proofs of this are so plain, that they cannot be avoided; and so well known that I need not at large repeat them. There is no duty we are more frequently commanded, none we are more earnestly exhorted to, than to pray to God; we have the examples of all good men for it, and of Christ himself, who spent whole nights in prayer; and we have the encouragements of as express promises as any in Scripture, that if we pray to God, he will hear and answer us; which is all the encouragement we can desire for our prayers. As the Psalmist speaks: "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come:" Ps. lxv. 2. To thee they shall pray, because thou hearest prayer. "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me:" Ps. lxxxvi. 5, 7. "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him,

to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he will also hear their cry, and will save them:" Ps. cxlv. 18, 19. But nothing can be more express than our Saviour's promise, "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened:" Matt. vii. 7, 8.

And what great things are attributed in Scripture to the power of prayer? St. James assures us that "the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much;" and proves it from the example of Elias, who was "a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit:" James v. 17, 18. And all those wonders which the apostle to the Hebrews attributes to faith, belongs to this prayer of faith. Heb. xi. 32—34. For this reason Jacob's name was changed into Israel, when he wrestled all night with the angel and would not let him go till he had blessed him: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and men, and hast prevailed:" Gen. xxxii. 28.

One would think that this were abundantly sufficient to convince all men of the duty, necessity, and advantages of prayer; for if God govern the world, and we must expect his blessing and protection only in answer to our prayers; if he himself makes prayer the necessary condition of our receiving, it is vain to dispute the philosophy of it, for we must ask if we will receive. We can receive of none but God, and he has promised to give to none but those who ask: and therefore, though we may receive many good things without asking, as God does both to the evil and to the good, yet we can never be secure that we shall receive; and the good things we do receive without asking, seldom prove blessings to us, and as seldom lasting.

But to satisfy these men, if it be possible, in the reasonableness and necessity of this duty, and to give them a true notion of prayer, let us briefly consider their objections against it. And the sum of all is this, that they cannot conceive

how our prayers should signify any thing with God, or obtain any blessings for us, which he would not have bestowed on us without our asking. To be good and virtuous they will allow is necessary to entitle us to the favour and protection of Providence; and there is reason to believe that God will do good to good men, whether they ask or not; but they cannot see for what wise ends prayer serves, or how it should be any reason for God to give. Does not God know our wants before we ask? or does he need to be informed by our prayers what we would have him do for us? Are not our wants, and his own essential goodness a sufficient motive for him to give? Or does he want to be entreated and importuned? which would argue a want of goodness. In short, can God be moved and changed by our prayers to alter his counsels, to do that good for us which otherwise he would not have done, or to divert those evils which he intended to have brought on us? which represents God as changeable as man, and derogates from the immutability of his nature and counsels.

Now in answer to this, let us consider in the first place whether these objections do not prove too much? that is, whether they do not equally destroy the reasonableness of making any prayers or petitions to men as well as to God?

There is a great difference indeed upon this account, that good men may be ignorant of our wants, and may need to be informed. But is this the only reason of our asking; to inform men of our wants? Does any good man think himself bound, though he know our wants, to supply them without our asking? Do we think it any diminution to any man's goodness, that he will not give unless he be asked? Good men, indeed, do a great many good offices without being asked, and so does a good God; but in most cases they think it very reasonable to be asked, and that it is pride and stomach not to ask, and that is reason enough not to give. It does not become some men to ask, when it may become others to give; for it requires some interest, and some pretence to favour and kindness to have a right to ask; but all men expect that those who depend on them, and know that they may have for asking, should ask for what they want. Parents expect this from their children, and a prince from his subjects. and will see their wants, and let them want on

till they think fit to ask: and if wise and good men expect this from their dependents, a wise and good God may as reasonably expect this from his creatures, who have their whole dependence on him: for let any man show me the difference; if it be consistent with wisdom and goodness to expect to be asked, why may not a wise and good God expect this, as well as a wise and good man?

Thus as changeable as men are in their wills, and counsels, and passions, do we use to charge any man with fickleness and inconstancy only because he gives when he is asked, and will not give when he is not asked? that is, does it prove any man to be mutable to change only as a wise and immutable rule requires him to change? Such uniform and regular changes as these prove an immutability of counsels; and if this be the standing rule of providence, it argues no more change in God to give when we ask, and not to give when we do not ask, than it is to punish a man when he is wicked, and to reward him when he is good.

The passions and affections of human nature are the most fickle and inconstant things; and when they move mechanically by external and sensible impressions, either against reason or at least without it, they betray men to that unevenness and uncertainty in all their actions, as disparages both their wisdom and goodness; for when they do good by such blind impulses, and strong and heady passions, they do good by chance; and another torrent of different passions may do as much hurt.

But yet it is no disparagement to the immutability of wisdom and goodness, to be moved by passions when reason and not mere sense moves them; for reason is an even and steady mover. To say that a man's passions and affections are moved by reason to do that which he never intended to have done without that reason, does not unbecome the wisest and best man in the world; and therefore to say that a good man is moved by prayers, and entreaties, and complaints, to pity and compassion, and to do good, contrary to his former intentions and inclinations, is no reproach to him.

Nor is it any reproach to the Divine nature and providence to say, that God is moved by our prayers and entreaties to do that for us which otherwise he would not have done; for it neither unbecomes God nor men to be moved by reason.

We live in a critical age, which will not allow us to speak intelligibly of God, because we want words sufficiently to distinguish between the motions and actions of the Divine mind, and the passions of creatures. Our conceptions of the Divine nature are very imperfect, and so must our words necessarily be, and therefore unless you will venture the censure of some men, who conceal their atheism under a religious silence and veneration, and will not allow any thing to be said or thought of God, for fear of thinking and speaking dishonourably of him, you must not say that God hears or sees, because he has no bodily ears or eyes; or that there are any such affections in God as love or hatred, joy or sorrow, anger or repentance, pity and compassion, because those sensible commotions which accompany these passions in men, are not incident to the Divine nature.

But if the Scripture be a good rule both of believing and speaking, we may very honourably say that of God, which God says of himself, and believe that all these affections are in God, in such a perfect and excellent manner as becomes an infinite and eternal mind. Some men think that the Scripture's attributing love, and joy, and delight, hatred, sorrow and compassion, to God, is no better reason to ascribe such affections to him, than it is to say, that God has bodily eyes, and ears, and feet, and hands, because the Scripture attributes them also to God. But there is a wide difference between these two; for the Scripture has taken sufficient care to inform us, that God is an infinite and unbodied Spirit, without shape or figure, and that is reason to believe, that these are only allusive and metaphorical expressions, which represent the powers by the instruments of the action; seeing by eyes, and hearing by ears. But these affections, which are attributed to God, are not instruments, but powers, and are as essential to a mind as wisdom and knowledge. A pure mind must have pure and intellectual affections, which move with greater strength and certainty, though without the disturbance of human passions. It is impossible to conceive a mind without wisdom and knowledge, or to conceive wisdom and knowledge without an intellectual approbation and abhorrence; for perfect wisdom must approve and disapprove; and the several ways of approving or disapproving constitute the several passions and affections of the soul, and

therefore these must be as perfect in God as wisdom is, though as void of sensible passions as a pure spirit is.

Now if God have such affections as these, which may be moved in a manner suitable to the Divine perfections, then prayer may move him, and prevail with him to show mercy and kindness. Thus the Scripture represents it; and without such a representation as this, there can be no reason nor foundation for prayer.

Not to show you this in particular, how God has been moved by the intercessions of good men to change his counsels, and to spare those whom he had threatened to destroy, of which we have a famous example in the intercession of Moses for Israel, when they had made the golden calf and worshipped it; (Exod. xxxii. 9, 10, &c.) of which the Psalmist tells us, "He said he would destroy them, had not Moses, his chosen, stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them." Psal. cvi. 23. I say, not to insist on such examples now, I shall only observe, that most of our Saviour's arguments and parables, whereby he encourageth our faith in prayer, are resolved into this principle, that God is moved by our prayers in some analogy and proportion as men are; that whatever effect of our prayers we may reasonably expect from wise, and kind, and good men, that we may more certainly expect from God.

Our Saviour promises, Matt. vii. 7—10: "Ask, and it shall be given unto you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." This is as full a promise as can be made; and yet for their greater security, he proves to their own sense and feeling that it needs must be so. We know and feel what the natural kindness and tenderness of earthly parents are for their children, how ready they are to answer all their reasonable requests, especially when it is for the supply of their necessary wants; and thus he assures us it is with God, and much more, because there is no comparison between the kindness and tenderness of earthly parents, and the goodness of God. "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then

being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

Thus our Saviour represents the power of importunity by the parable of a man who came to his friend to borrow some bread of him when he was in bed, which was so unseasonable a time, as made it troublesome and uneasy; but though mere friendship could not prevail with him to do it, importunity did, Luke xi. 5, &c., and by the parable of the importunate widow, and the unjust judge, who, though he had no regard to justice, yet was conquered by her importunity, to avenge her of her enemy; "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" Luke xviii. 2, &c. If importunity will prevail, where neither friendship, nor the love of justice will prevail, how much more will it prevail with a good, and merciful, and righteous God.

Indeed, most of our Saviour's parables proceed upon that likeness and resemblance which is between human passions and the affections of the Divine nature, that we may certainly expect that from God which we can reasonably expect from wise and good men in the like cases. What either friendship, or a love of virtue, or natural affections, or interest, and relation, and private concernment, will do, that God will do for us, as is evident in the parables of the lost sheep, and lost groat, and prodigal son, which could have no foundation were not God in some analogy moved as men are. It is certain our Saviour intended we should understand it so, when he makes it the reason of our faith and hope in prayer. And if it be thus, we see the reason and necessity of prayer, and know how to pray to God so as to prevail; to pray to God as we would in the like cases ask of men, with the same importunity, ardour, vehemence, sorrow and contrition, trust and dependence; for what will prevail with men, will much more prevail with God.

And indeed there are very wise reasons why God should make prayer the necessary condition of our receiving; as that his power and providence may be universally owned and acknowledged by mankind; that we may live in a constant dependence on him, and be sensible that all we receive is his gift; to lay restraints upon men's ungoverned lusts

and appetites, that they may never expect success without prayer; and therefore may never dare attempt any thing for which they dare not pray.

These are wise reasons why God should not give, unless we ask; and therefore if we believe that God governs the world, it is our interest, as well as our duty, to pray to him; for we have no title to his protection without it. Let us then, in all conditions, make our humble and hearty prayers and supplications to God, and recommend ourselves and all our concernments to him. I say, in all conditions, because God has the supreme and sovereign disposal of all. There are too many who think, that when all things are prosperous, when they have goods laid up for many years, when they have powerful friends, and their enemies at their feet, that there is no great need then to pray to God, because they do not want him. The Psalmist himself was tempted by a prosperous fortune to great security: "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved." But God quickly convinced him, that his security did not consist in external supports, but in the Divine favour:—"Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong; thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." Ps. xxx. 6, 7. No man is safe but in God's protection: there are a thousand unseen accidents and surprising events, which may disappoint all other hope and confidence; but "they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever: as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, henceforth for ever and ever." Ps. cxxv. 1, 2.

Others think it to as little purpose to pray, when their condition is desperate and hopeless; when they cannot see how God can save them without a miracle, and miracles they must not hope for. But what is it that God cannot do, who has all nature at his command? We must not indeed expect miracles; but he who has the absolute government of the natural and moral world can do what he pleases without miracles. Nothing is impossible to God, and nothing is impossible to him that believes, who prays to God in faith and hope.

Nay, the example of our Saviour teacheth us something more than this; that though we were as certain that God

would not deliver us from what we fear, as he was that it was appointed for him, by God's immutable decree and counsel, to die upon the cross; yet it is not in vain to pray as he did: "O my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." And the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, that though God did not deliver him from death, yet he heard and answered his prayers. "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared:" Heb. v. 7. That is, though God did not deliver him from death, he delivered him from his fears, sent an angel to comfort him, and enabled him to endure the pain, and to despise the shame of the cross. And though God should in like manner afflict us, or we should have great reason to believe he will do so; yet, if in answer to our prayers and cries, he should pull out the sting of afflictions, and sweeten them with divine comforts, and some unexpected allays, and give us courage and patience to bear them, it is equivalent to a deliverance, and usually better for us than to have been delivered; for when God inflicts such punishments on us, even when he mercifully hears our prayers and cries, we may be sure that he intends it for some great good to us; and to reap the benefits of afflictions, without feeling the sting of them, is better than to be delivered from them: this is to be "heard in what we fear."

This may satisfy us as to the necessity and obligation of this duty of prayer, and what great reason and encouragement we have in all conditions to pray to God. But we must remember, that praise and thanksgiving are as essential a part of the divine worship, and as much due to God's care and providence over us, as prayer is.

I need not enlarge on this, because all mankind acknowledge it a duty to praise our benefactors, which is only to acknowledge from whom we have received the good things we have. And if God be the giver of all good things to us, can we do less than acknowledge that we receive all from God?—The whole book of Psalms is full of examples of this kind; and there is so little need to prove this to be a duty, that every man who is sensible of any kindness that is done him, can no more avoid thanking his benefactor, than rejoic-

ing in the benefit he has received. It is not only matter of duty but of necessity, to do it, till men have put off human nature, and lost the sensations of it.

We must not indeed conceive so meanly of God, as if he were charmed with the praises of his creatures, as some vain men are with popular applause. A wise man is above this —much more God. A man who knows himself, thinks neither the better nor worse of himself for popular praise or reproach. Praise is due to virtue; but if it miss of it, the world may suffer by it, not the virtuous man, if he have that command of his passions and resentments as a wise and good man ought to have. Praise is nothing else but the good opinion of other men concerning us, and reproach their ill opinion; and if they be mistaken in their opinions, they make us neither better nor worse, unless we make ourselves so—but the world may suffer by it; for a good man, when he is unjustly reproached, though he may support himself with a sense of his innocence and virtue, yet he loses the pleasure and freedom of conversation, the authority of his example and counsels, and many advantages and opportunities of doing good.

To apply this to God: I need not prove that so glorious and perfect a being is infinitely above our praises; that we can add nothing to him by our most triumphant hymns and hallelujahs, any otherwise than as he sees it infinitely reasonable and congruous for the happiness of creatures, and a great instrument of providence that they should praise him; God suffers nothing by it, if we refuse to praise him; but we do, and the world does; and he has no other satisfaction in it than to see his creatures do what becomes them, and what will make them happy.

All the blessings we receive from God, especially such as concern this life, lose their true taste and relish without praise. To contemplate and adore the Divine wisdom and goodness which encompasses the whole creation, and dispenses his favours with a liberal hand, is a more transporting pleasure than all the enjoyments of the world can give us. Here is a noble exercise of love, and joy, and admiration, which are the most delightful passions of the soul, and as far above the pleasures of sense as a man excels a beast. This makes us feel ourselves happy, not only in what we at present have,

which, if we look no farther than intermediate causes, is very uncertain: but in a secure prospect of happiness while we adhere to God. A soul which is ravished with the praises of God, and possessed with a lively sense of his goodness, can fear no evil, is out of the reach of solicitous cares; is contented in every condition as allotted him by God; nay, is patient under sufferings themselves, which are the corrections or discipline of a kind father: he considers how much good he receives from God, and how far it exceeds all the evils he suffers; and therefore he has reason to bless God still, as Job did: for "shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" especially when the good we receive proves the very evils we suffer to be good, because they are inflicted by a good God.

All these graces and virtues are owing to the belief of a Divine providence, and cannot be had without it; they belong to that submission to God, and trust in his providence, which I have already explained; but it is praise and thanksgiving which awaken that vigorous sense of God, which exercises all these virtues, and gives us the ease and satisfaction of them.

Thus, when God loses his praise, we lose the ease and security of our lives: but this is not all; for the world also in a great measure loses the benefit and advantage of God's government, which as much disappoints the wise designs of providence.

Not to own our benefactor is to lose the sense of our dependence, which makes all the goodness of God lost on sinners; for the goodness of God cannot affect any man, cannot lead him to repentance, can be no reason nor encouragement to virtue, if it be not owned.

This spoils the very blessings which God bestows on us, which we shall never use to our own happiness, without owning and praising the giver of them. He who remembers that he receives all from God, and is affected with the divine goodness and bounty in giving, will use the good things he receives according to the mind and intention of the giver; and this is the only way to enjoy the benefit of the gift.

God does not give men riches merely to look on, or to imprison, or to spend on their lusts; nor advance them to

honours to make them proud and insolent; nor give them a large portion of this world to make them forget the next; he who is thankful to God for all his blessings, cannot do this; for this is the highest ingratitude, to affront and provoke God with the abuse of what he gives; and he who does thus, loses the blessing, though he has the gift. A covetous man is never the better for his riches, because he cannot use them; and a voluptuous man is much the worse, because he uses them to his own hurt. When high places and dignities make men proud and insolent, it forfeits the honour of them; and he who forgets, and by forgetting loses the next world, has a very hard purchase of this.

Nay, such men do not only disappoint God's goodness to themselves, but frustrate the gracious designs of his providence in making them the instruments and ministers of his goodness to others. For those who take no notice of the Divine providence, but are very unthankful to God for what they have, are so far from doing any good, that they do great mischief to others, as well as to themselves.

Those who are sensible that they receive all from God, and are thankful for it, remember that they are but God's stewards, which is a great honour, but a great trust too, and requires faithfulness; in thankfulness to God, who has so liberally provided for them, they think themselves bound to imitate his goodness, to supply the wants, and undertake the patronage of those who want their help, and in the judgment of prudence and charity deserve it.

But an unthankful man has no more regard to his fellow creatures than he has to God; a covetous man, who will not supply his own wants, to be sure will not relieve the wants of others; and if a voluptuous man does any kindness, the receivers pay dear for it; for he makes them the partners or instruments of his lusts. A rich sinner helps to debauch a whole neighbourhood, and a powerful sinner to oppress them; and the daily experience of the world tells us what mischief riches, and honour, and power, do in the hands of wicked and unthankful men.

This I think may satisfy any considering man in the absolute necessity of praise and thanksgiving, which is not only such an acknowledgment of the Divine glory as be-

comes creatures, but is necessary to our own happiness, to our wise improvement of the blessings of God, and to the good government of the world; and all men must confess, that this is a wise and just reason for God to recall his gifts, to take away what he had given to unthankful men, and to give them no more, not only because they disown their benefactor, but because they abuse all that he gives them to their own, and to other men's hurt. All that he gives is lost on them. He loses the praise, and they themselves, and everybody else the comfort and advantage of it.

And thus I have finished this discourse of providence; whereby I hope it will appear, that there are great reasons to believe a providence, that the objections against it are ignorant mistakes, and that nothing tends so much to the ease, and comfort, and good government of our lives, as to acknowledge God to be the supreme sovereign Lord of the world.

THE END.

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